

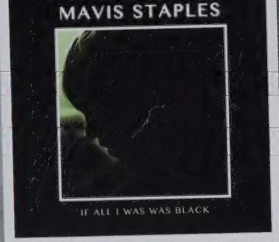


**Lynn Miles**

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**Reviews**

Mavis  
Staples  
"Marvelous"

**Rita Coolidge**

"There were people of all  
colours over at Stax making  
the best music in the world."



# pengin eggs

the dead south  
don ross  
alistair anderson

Issue No. 77 Spring 2018 \$5.99



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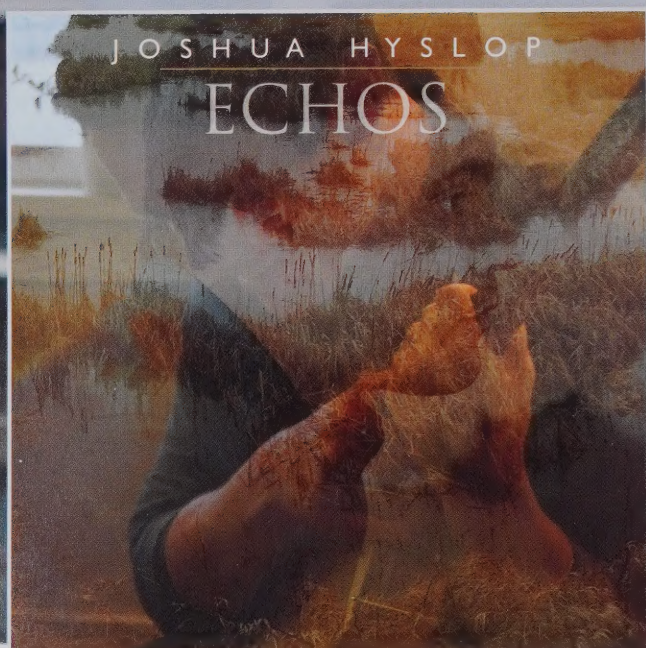
## great lost canadian folk venues



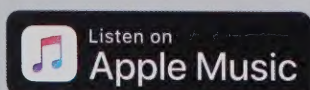
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### Chris Smither

He has recorded discs of considerable taste and indomitable originality, covered by the likes of Bonnie Raitt and Emmylou Harris. And yet, to find success, he first had to plumb the depths of despair.

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She recruited the likes of Jimmy Vaughan, Charlie Sexton, and ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons to grace her striking new blues recording.



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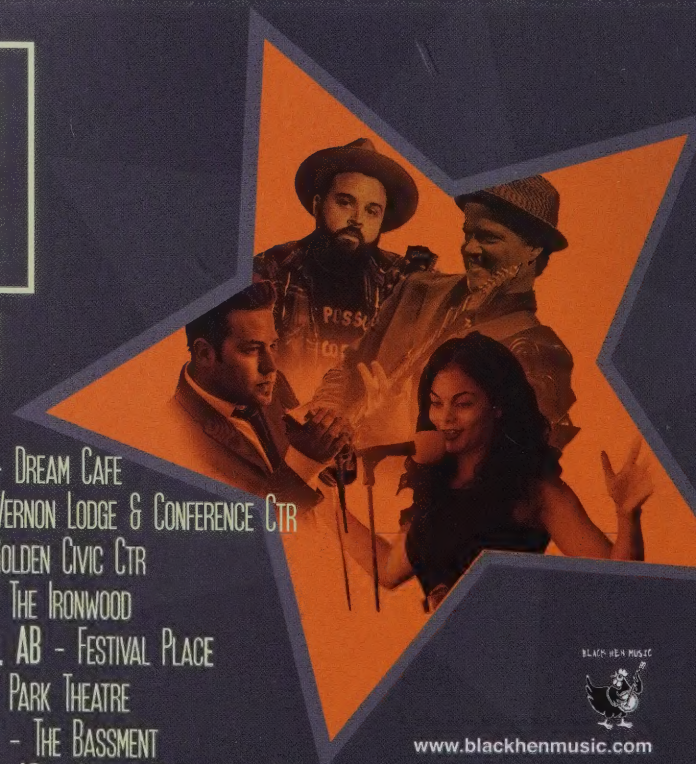
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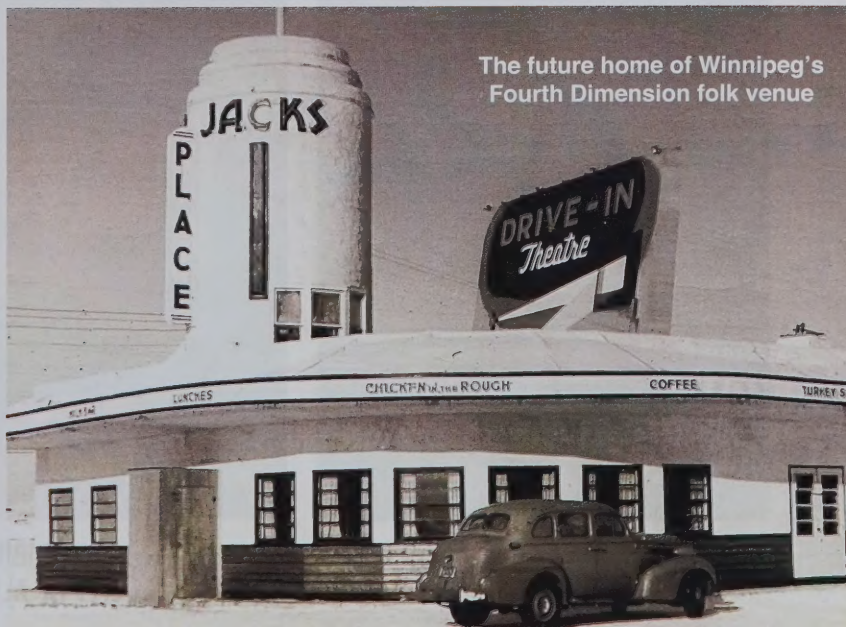
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# penguin eggs

The Folk, Roots and World Music Magazine

Issue No. 77, Spring, 2018

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This magazine takes its name from Nic Jones's wonderful album *Penguin Eggs* — a collection of mainly traditional British folk songs revitalized with extraordinary flair and ingenuity. Released in Britain in 1980, it has grown into a source of inspiration for such diverse artists as Bob Dylan, Warren Zevon and Kate Rusby.

Nic, sadly, suffered horrific injuries in a car crash in 1982 and has never fully recovered. In 2012, however, he finally made an emotional comeback, performing at several events throughout the summer. His care and respect shown for the tradition and prudence to recognize the merits of innovation makes *Penguin Eggs* such an outrageously fine recording. It's available through Topic Records. This magazine strives to reiterate its spirit.

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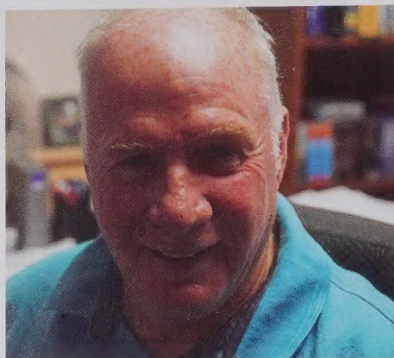
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# Editorial



The rising sales of LPs (now marketed as vinyl) offers the one small source of sanity in a madcap music industry ravaged by years of Internet abuse and clueless marketing.

According to Nielsen Music Canada, LP sales in 2017 were the highest in 20 years. Nielsen tracks music sales in all formats. Their data reveals seven straight years of market growth for vinyl. Bandcamp, the reputable Online American music company that provides distribution and merchandising for numerous independent artists, reported that purchases of LPs increased 54% last year. And The Independent newspaper in the U.K. reported that sales of LPs have now reached a level there not seen since the early Nineties.

While these stats are undeniably heart-warming and impressive, and suggest more than a passing trend, they still remain insignificant compared to music sold or streamed in digital formats. Through paid portals, Canadians streamed an incredible 39 billion—yes, 39 billion—songs in 2017 and bought 804,000 LPs. And what percentage of these figures adheres to folk and roots recordings? Unfortunately, the statistics available do not highlight such categories.

There are, of course, numerous reasons touted for the increased interest in LPs. While countless bloggers and music journalists now huff and puff enthusiastically about the infinite aesthetic qualities of vinyl recordings,

most agree on its fundamental merits. The sound, in terms of warmth and quality, tops the list. The hipster-cool, one-upmanship, of owning a record nobody else has discovered in vinyl can still torment peers, apparently. Nostalgia, too, plays its part. Delve into your parents or grandparents decades-old record collections and you're listening to history.

Undoubtedly, the complex and beautiful art work that often decorates the packaging of LPs, and the accompanying extensive sleeve notes, also plays a part of the attraction. Lynn Miles certainly thinks so: "I loved buying vinyl because I could hold the record in my hands and read the lyrics, the names of the players and songwriters, what studio was used," she writes on the following page. Chris Smither says virtually the same thing in our cover feature.

But there's more, traditional folk musicians often had the good grace to include extensive notes on tunings for particular songs or instrumentals, the key they were played in, and background information about particular pieces of music, including where they were discovered—a real starting point for any young, ambitious, aspiring musician. And these records are still out there, having recently found Beausoleil's *Zydeco Gris Gris* and Bert Jansch's *A Rare Conundrum* at my local mall.

Consequently, renewed interest in LPs has created amazing technological advances in audio systems. No longer do imposing speakers need hard-wiring to an amp and turntable. Record players now connect to volume-controlled speakers through Bluetooth and can be placed anywhere within a generous radius.

The beautiful upshot of all this activity has meant I'm again enjoying the thrill of all of the precious records that sparked my initial life-long obsession with music—at 33 1/3 RPM, natch'.

— Roddy Campbell



# The Record That Changed My Life



**Lynn Miles:** The celebrated singer/songwriter salutes Jennifer Warnes's tribute to Leonard Cohen, *Famous Blue Raincoat*.

I confess: back in the day, I was one of those people who couldn't listen to Leonard Cohen.

Considering how important his music is to me now, it seems impossible, (this is such a cliché) but I just couldn't get past the voice. It wasn't the sadness, I wanted the sadness, it was the voice.

Thankfully, Jennifer Warnes changed all that by recording *Famous Blue Raincoat: The Songs Of Leonard Cohen*, in late 1986. "Jenny Sings Lenny" was/is a perfect record.

Jennifer had toured with Leonard for years, so I can't imagine anyone more perfect to curate, choose, and interpret the songs. Jennifer also co-wrote *Song Of Bernadette*, a song that has no peer. There's a great back story on the writing of that song; you can find it on her website.

This record became my best friend and constant road companion; sometimes it was the only music I listened to for days and days on tour. I still love it as much as the day I first heard it. Just listening to Stevie Ray Vaughan on the first track is worth the price of admission.

I was fortunate enough to meet Jennifer. I knew by listening to the album that she was a serious artist, an interpreter of the highest level. Talking to her about music, performance, and life made me appreciate how profound her gifts are. The river is very deep.

On this record, every song, every verse, every word, every note, has a revered place and purpose. There's no excess, only art. It

is both precise and free. It has innocence, sexuality, groove, and space.

The arrangements stand up over time. Each song is given the respect and universe it deserves. But it's Jennifer's voice—graceful, angelic, evocative, and powerful all at the same time—that is the tender beating heart of the record. It's what allowed me to enter the room and then stay in the room and get to know the centre of the songs, the lyrics, the amazing melodies, the simple complexity, so I could discover the genius of Leonard Cohen. I will be forever grateful to Jennifer for being his champion.

After I courageously made my way into the world of Leonard, I knew I needed to explore Bob Dylan. My knowledge was sorely lacking because, again, I couldn't get past the voice. Foolish me. So on I travelled into Dylan Land, and it forever changed my approach to songwriting.

After that, I really started to love and appreciate the rough-voiced singers. Through Emmylou Harris's voice, I'd already discovered songwriters I might not have paid attention to, such as Towns Van Zant, Guy Clark...the list goes on. I can say the same about Linda Ronstadt; she introduced me

to Warren Zevon and I became a lifelong fan. I discovered so many great songwriters because beautiful voices lead me to them, none more important to me than Leonard Cohen.

An aside here: I loved buying vinyl because I could hold the record in my hands and read the lyrics, the names of the players and songwriters, what studio was used. That information was also such an important part of my learning experience as a new singer/songwriter. Maybe that's a part of what's going on with the surge in vinyl sales.

Because of *Famous Blue Raincoat*, there is a chant that now runs through my songwriter mind—"what would Leonard do". Because of *Famous Blue Raincoat*, I sweat every word I put on paper. And when I'm wearing the producer hat, I consider the individual universe of the song, and how to honour and serve the singer and the song.

Of course, it's all a hundred floors above me.

That's how much *Famous Blue Raincoat* changed my life...halfway through.

I went to my first Leonard Cohen show during his last tour. His voice was magnificent.







1939-2018

## Hugh Masekela

“The music of South Africa is about celebration and certainty,” Hugh Masekela once said. “Even in the old days of colonial oppression before apartheid, we never sang ‘when change will come’. We sang songs that celebrated freedom now.”

Born Hugh Ramapolo Masekela on April 4, 1939, in Kwa-Guqa township of Witbank, about 125 kilometres from Johannesburg, he was one of four children born to Thomas and Pauline (née Bowers) and into a politically conscious family. Seemingly destined, by his own admission, for a delinquent life of thieving and fighting, his life was turned around by the future Anglican Archbishop Trevor Huddleston. (Nelson Mandela: “No white person has done more for South Africa.”)

Under the sway of the film *Young Man With A Horn* (1950) modelled on the life of jazz cornetist Bix Beiderbecke, Masekela’s heart’s desire became the trumpet. Huddleston raised the rands and Masekela’s life’s course changed. Six years on, while promoting his book *Naught For Your Comfort* in the States, Huddleston mentioned the story in an interview. It reached Louis Armstrong’s ears. Moved, it led to Hud-

dleston sending Masekela the ultimate gift of one of Armstrong’s own horns.

Masekela played fundraisers for the yet-to-be-banned ANC and was a key component in the formulation of an Afro-jazz style using South African forms such as the pennywhistle-based street music called kwela, notably in *The Jazz Epistles*. In 1960, he escaped apartheid-era South Africa, circuitously settling in the States. Four years later, he married his first wife, the great South African songstress Miriam Makeba. In June 1967, Masekela revealed his bandleader side, playing in the Saturday evening slot at the Monterrey International Pop Festival ahead of The Byrds. He had already appeared (uncredited) on The Byrds’ *Younger Than Yesterday* (1967) on *So You Want To Be A Rock’n’Roll Star*.

An illustrious jazz career in Africa and the U.S.A. notwithstanding, this musical giant’s highest profile occurred as a key participant on Paul Simon’s *Graceland* (1986) and its subsequent promotion. Inordinately successful, it remains arguably the best known work involving African musicians and Simon’s finest hour.

Masekela died on Jan. 23, 2018, in Jo’burg.

– Ken Hunt

## Anthony Scaduto

Author and Journalist

Born 1932

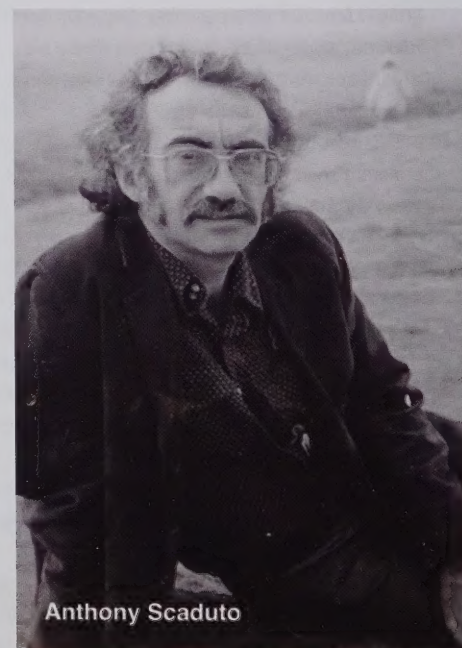
Former crime reporter Anthony Scaduto, who wrote the first serious biography of Bob Dylan, died Dec. 12 at his home in Brooklyn, NY, from complications from diabetes. He was 85.

*Bob Dylan: An Intimate Biography* was published in 1971, and is now considered a landmark book. Scaduto enjoyed unrestricted access to many of Dylan’s contemporaries: Joan Baez, Dave Van Ronk, Phil Ochs, Eric Von Schmidt... And furthermore, Dylan agreed to a rare interview with the author in January 1971 on the understanding he could read a rough draft of the book. Scaduto complied and spent more than three hours with Dylan in his Greenwich Village studio discussing various intimacies of the songwriter’s life.

“Dylan did most of the talking—he provided personal information that was surprising from so secretive a man,” wrote Scaduto in the foreword. Dylan was clearly impressed with Scaduto’s research and told him, “Your book didn’t hurt, in fact I rather enjoyed it.”

Born on March 7, 1932, in Brooklyn, Scaduto was a veteran reporter at the *New York Post* when he left to write the 280-page biography. It is now considered the first critical study of a rock icon. Further biographies by Scaduto included *Mick Jagger: Everybody’s Lucifer* (1974), *Frank Sinatra* (1976), and *Who Killed Marilyn Monroe?* (1976). Scaduto returned to daily journalism in 1980, writing for *The Post* and *New York Newsday* until he retired in 2002.

– Roddy Campbell



Anthony Scaduto



# Leo (Bud) Welch

Mississippi Delta Bluesman

Born 1932

Discovered at the age of 80, blues and gospel guitarist Leo (Bud) Welch recorded his debut album, *Leo Welch Sabouglia Voices*, for Big Legal Mess, a subsidiary of Fat Possum Records, in 2014, two months before his 82nd birthday.

It justifiably received international attention and he was hailed as “the real deal”—one of the last traditional backwoods Mississippi bluesmen. Welch died Dec. 19 at his home in Bruce, MS. He was 85.

Born in Sabouglia, MS, in 1932, Welch first learned to play a cousin’s guitar before he could afford to buy his own. He became so proficient that B.B. King offered him an audition. Welch, unfortunately, couldn’t afford the trip to Memphis. While he worked his whole life as a hardscrabble lumberjack, he played guitar in church and formed the Sabouglia Voices with his sister and sister-in-law. He also performed locally with the Skuna Valley Male Chorus.

Local impresario Vencie Varnado had known Welch all his life and had him play at his 50th birthday on April 19, 2013. Varnado surreptitiously filmed Welch on his iPhone and took the film to Fat Possum Records.

Varnado would become Welch’s manager and within a month they had recorded *Leo Welch Sabouglia Voices*. NPR radio picked up on it immediately and Welch’s story quickly spread. Consequently, he would play festivals in Europe and throughout North America, including Vancouver Island MusicFest (2014) and the Edmonton Folk Music Festival (2015). He was also the subject of the award-winning Austrian



Curly Seckler and Charlie Monroe, 1946.

documentary *Late Blossom Blues*.

Welch’s second and final release, *I Don’t Prefer No Blues*, was also released on Big Legal Mess on March 24, 2015, just two days after his 83rd birthday. He died after a brief illness.

A *Penguin Eggs* feature about Leo (Bud) Welch ran in issue No. 63.

—Roddy Campbell

## Curly Seckler

Bluegrass Pioneer

Born 1919

With his percussive mandolin playing and powerful tenor singing, Curly Seckler performed alongside some of the most iconic figures in bluegrass, most notably with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs’s Foggy Mountain Boys.

Seckler also worked with The Stanley Brothers, Jim & Jesse, Mac Wiseman, The Sauterman Brothers, and Charlie Monroe. Seckler died in Nashville, TN, Dec. 27. He was 98.

A first-generation bluegrass musician, Curly Seckler was born John Ray Sechler on Dec. 25, 1919, in China Grove, NC, the fourth of eight children. His father, Calvin, played autoharp and his mother, Carrie, the guitar and organ. Curly started on tenor banjo and, formed the Yodelling Rangers in 1935 with his brothers.

They landed a daily spot on WSTP Radio in Salisbury, NC. And by the time Curly had turned 19, he had caught the ear of Charlie Monroe, brother of the estranged Bill Monroe, who recruited him for his Kentucky Partners.

Seckler subsequently took up the mandolin and performed with numerous other bluegrass artists—Mac Wiseman, Jim & Jesse, Tommy

Scott, and Leonard Stokes—before joining Flatt & Scruggs in 1949.

Three years later, the band moved to Nashville to host their own show on WSM radio. While Seckler stayed with Flatt & Scruggs until 1962, co-writing such standards as *That Old Book of Mine* and *No Mother or Dad* and appearing regularly on the Grand Ole Opry, he also put in occasional shifts with The Sauce-man Brothers and The Stanley Brothers.

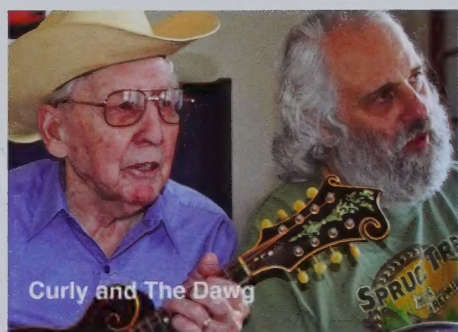
But money grew tight, and Seckler gave up music to drive a truck to feed his family. It took the best part of a decade before he seriously strapped on his mandolin again and recorded his first solo LP, *Curly Seckler Sings Again* (1971). Two years later, though, he rejoined Lester Flatt’s The Nashville Grass. And when Flatt died in 1979, Seckler took over the band until it disbanded in 1994. In all, he record five albums, including the acclaimed *60 Years of Bluegrass With My Friends* (1995).

Seckler was inducted into the International Bluegrass Music Association’s Hall of Fame in 2004. His biography, *Foggy Mountain Troubadour: The Life and Music of Curly Seckler*, by Penny Parson, was published in 2016.

—Roddy Campbell



Leo (Bud) Welch



Curly and The Dawg



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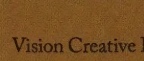
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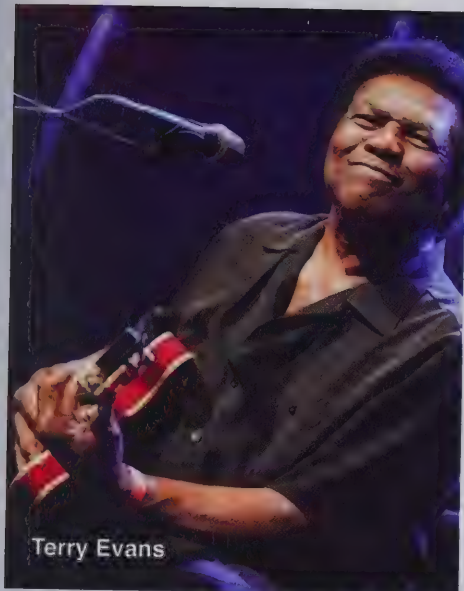
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Terry Evans

## Terry Evans

Soul, Gospel and Blues Singer  
Born 1937

**W**idely known for his spirited gospel and soulful vocal contributions on recordings by the likes of

Eric Clapton, John Fogarty, Joan Armatrading, John Lee Hooker, Maria Muldaur, and Boz Scaggs, Mississippi Delta-born singer and songwriter Terry Evans died Jan. 20, in Los Angeles, CA. He was 80.

While he also wrote songs covered by such celebrated figures as Pops Staples (*Love Is A Precious Thing*) and Louis Jordan (*Hop, Skip, and Jump*), Evans gained widespread recognition for his work with Ry Cooder, touring with his band and recording such albums as *Chicken Skin Music*, *Get Rhythm*, *Pull Up Some Dust And Sit Down*, and *My Name Is Buddy*. Evans also featured on the key track, *Down In Mississippi*, on the movie *Crossroads*, for which Cooder wrote much of the soundtrack.

Born in Vicksburg, MS, Aug. 14, 1937, in the heart of the Delta, Terry Evans first sang in church before forming The Knights, a local, semi-professional a cappella group. Relocating to Los Angeles in the 1960s, he met fellow Sax-inspired soul singer Bobby King and noted multi-instrumentalist and roots music aficionado Cooder. Both King and Evans would work extensively with Cooder. For the best part of 25 years, they also toured regularly as a duo or with pickup bands and record two highly acclaimed albums, *Live and Let Live!* (1988) and *Rhythm, Blues, Soul & Grooves* (1990). King went on to work with Bruce Springsteen. Evans made his solo debut *Blues For Thought* (1994), with Ry Cooder as producer. He also played guitar on the recording.

In all, Evans released seven solo albums before recording and touring laterly with the Dutch bluesman Hans Theesnik, with whom he released his final disc, *True and Blue Live* (2015). Paying tribute to Evans online, Theesnik posted: "One of the greatest voices in American music."

— Roddy Campbell

## Algia Mae Hinton

Piedmont Blues Singer and Buckdancer  
Born 1929

**A**lgia Mae Hinton, one of the last surviving old-style Piedmont blues players, died Feb. 8 at her home in Middlesex, NC. She was 88.

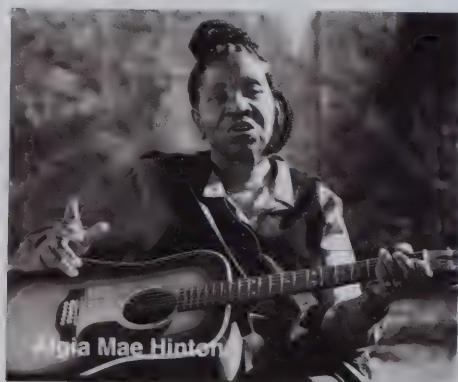
Named after the U.S.A. Piedmont plateau region, that stretches from New Jersey in the north to central Alabama in the south, it's characterized by a guitar fingerpicking style that creates melodies comparable to ragtime.

Born on Aug. 29, 1929, to poor tenant farmers, Alexander and Ollie O'Neal, Algia Mae grew up the youngest of 14 children. Her mother, Ollie, played numerous stringed instruments and taught Algia Mae guitar and banjo. As a teen, she became a fixture at area dances and house parties. A gifted buckdancer as well as musician, she raised seven children on her own after the tragic, premature death of her husband, Millard R. Hinton.

As a result, Algia Mae did not make her professional debut until 1978, appearing at the North Carolina Folklife Festival at the behest of folklorist Glenn Hinson. From there, her reputation spread and she went on to perform in such prestigious venues as Carnegie Hall.

She released her debut disc *Honey Babe* (Blues, Folk Tunes And Gospel From North Carolina) in 1985, featured in the documentary *Living the Blues*, and shared her story in the book *Music Makers: Portraits and Songs from the Roots of America*. She received the North Carolina Folk Heritage Award in 1992.

— Roddy Campbell



Algia Mae Hinton



Tom Rapp

## Tom Rapp

Psych Folk Pioneer  
Born 1947

**P**sychedelic albums came out in June 1967: *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *One Nation*

*Underground* by Pearls Before Swine, released by the indie label ESP Disc.

Pearls' unearthly music used ouds, sarangis, and oscillators to create an inimitable folk/rock soundscape. The lyrics were poetic and fragmentary, delivered by a singer with a slight lisp and sing/talk style. The lack of band photos, the quality of the singing, and the acid-folk experimentation of the music led one reviewer to suppose it was a collaboration between Bob Dylan and The Beatles, released under the pseudonym of Pearls Before Swine.

Pearls were actually the creation of Tom Rapp and three high school friends from Florida. When his friends quit the band, Rapp continued performing as Pearls Before Swine.

He made four albums for Warner/Reprise—*These Things Too*, *The Use of Ashes*, *City of Gold*, and *Beautiful Lies You Could Live In*—that got rave reviews, but no sales.

After two albums on Blue Thumb, Rapp put away his guitar and went back to school. He became a lawyer, specializing in civil rights cases, but his musical legacy lived on. Elton John cited him as an influence, and he returned to the studio in 1999 to make *A Journal of The Plague Year* (Woronzow) his first record in 26 years.

He played a few dates to support the album, but concentrated on his law practice. He was diagnosed with cancer in 2014 and passed away this February.

— J. Poet



# Introducing Molly Evans



**Q**: What do George Best, Rod Stewart, Bobby Charlton, Bruce Springsteen, Cristiano Ronaldo, Bon Jovi, Eric Cantona, Status Quo, Denis Law, and, er, Molly Evans have in common?  
**A**: They've all played at Old Trafford, Manchester United football club's fabled theatre of dreams.

That's something nobody can ever take away from Molly, although she may have to admit it was at a small showcase in the ground's plush hospitality suite as part of last year's Folk Expo rather than 75,000 howling fans on the pitch, but a gig's a gig and it did alert a lot of groovy industry types to the arrival of a beguiling new talent.

Originally from Cheshire in the northwest of England (but now living in Sheffield) and raised in a family immersed in folk music Molly looks to have a golden future, especially if her new EP *Deep Time & Narrow Space* is anything to go by.

Eschewing the folk degree course favoured by so many of her contemporaries in favour of a maths degree at Oxford, and naming Eliza Carthy as a primary inspiration ("when I was four or five, I'd listen to her music on a loop—how could you not love all that power?"), she became an accomplished fiddle player as well as a sensitive song interpreter. On the six-track EP, she forgoes the fiddle, however, to play a duet concertina inherited from her dad ("the fiddle just didn't seem right for this material"). *Deep Time & Narrow Space* is a bold enterprise that interprets the stories and poetry of a family friend—renowned Cheshire poet and writer Alan Garner—and brings them to life musically.

"My mum did a lot of charity work with Alan and his wife, Griselda, and she gave me one of his books, *Collected Folk Tales*, and I was captivated. It's a beautiful purple and gold embossed book that takes tales from all over the world and re-tells them in a Cheshire dialect. What often happens when these stories from the oral tradition are written down is that they lose some of their magic and get sanitized and Alan wanted to give them new life and de-santize them. As soon as I read one of the poems, *Maggoty's Wood*, a tune appeared in my head and it just seemed natural and logical to put it into song. And once I started I wanted to do others."

A bold and challenging undertaking, especially with the author living up the road.

"I gave him a copy of the CD and was terrified he wouldn't like it, but he said he did so that was a relief."

Molly's alluring singing and thoughtful concertina supplemented by the melodeon of Archie Churchill-Moss and the guitar/banjo/bouzouki of Jack Rutter (himself a major new talent on the U.K. scene), it establishes Molly's credentials as a formidable force both as a writer and traditional singer.

The maths degree didn't go to waste—she is currently balancing her gigging with work as a mathematical analyst—but is enthused enough to be talking about recording a full-length album in the near future.

"I was so lucky being exposed to all this music from a young age and feel so honoured to be performing this music. It's a lifetime dream, really."

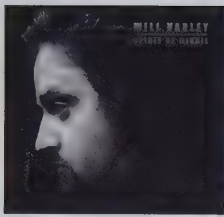
Did you ever rebel against folk music and go with your mates to the local rave or whatever young people do these days?

"No, I never did. When I was at primary school I had the choice of either going to Disneyland, Florida, or Sidmouth Folk Festival and I chose Sidmouth...that says it all really."

— By Colin Irwin







# Introducing Will Varley

**M**y finest live-music experience in 2017 was singing—or make that screaming and sharing—*We Don't Believe You Anymore* with Will Varley and tens of thousands of other folks. Standing, dancing, fistfist against ubiquitous lies in our interesting times we were keen to rage against, if only momentarily, during an electrifying, chord-striking, nerve-touching performance by a “tweener” between main-stage set-ups, dodging the stage crew and ‘test, tests,’ with his well-travelled, nylon-string guitar.

“A very interesting fellow with things to say and stories to tell,” advised the festival program. “No kidding,” I thought, scribbling circles around listed appearances, and setting off on one of those wonderful folk-fest journeys: to the CD tent, Google, and YouTube, the interview table and a handful of intense back-stage chats.

Will Varley cut his teeth early, busking and playing everywhere he could find, carrying fake ID, and a headful of songs. He co-founded Smugglers Records, and in 2011 took his debut album, *Advert Soundtracks*, on the road—walking 130 miles with a tent on his back, singing his songs—some silly, most serious, fiercely romantic, or political, but all of them...searching. After releasing a second album, he walked 500 miles (and figuratively, 500 more), opening for The Proclaimers, Beans on Toast, Frank Turner, Skinny Lister, and Billy Bragg, who all joined his growing, global fan base.

“Writing is cathartic; done it for as long as I can remember,” he reports. “Songs seem to fall out of my mind of their own accord, like drunks out of a nightclub. There’s no agenda; when something’s on my mind, I write. *Weddings And Wars* was a challenge of capturing world history in a song. *The Man Who Fell To Earth* came out of news when an African immigrant, stowed away in an aircraft’s landing gear, fell to his death at Heathrow. Some are self-explanatory: *To Build A Wall*, *We Want Our Planet Back*, and *Self-Checkout Shuffle*, for example.

“Songs are like wild animals; you can’t predict when, or how, they’re going to come at you, how they’re going to behave. And they no longer belong to me, when I’m done. I include a little bit of everything; wouldn’t make a record that never made anyone smile, let alone think. And it would be crazy not to comment on current injustices.”

Just before his first supporting gig in the Albert Hall, he signed with Xtra Mile Recordings; later releasing his breakout fourth album, *Kingsdown Sundown*. And in early February, unveiled the long-awaited followup, *Spirit Of Minnie*, at the culmination of a maiden, sold-out U.K. headline tour, in London’s Shepherd’s Bush Empire.

“The past 14 years have been an insane journey,” he reports. “Back in 2004, I played open-mic nights at the long-shut-down Ginglik, an old converted public toilet on the green, across the street,” he recalls.

The fifth Will Varley album is a surprise departure. He has his own backup band now, a brand-new Gibson Jumbo steel-string, and a 30-something perspective on life lived on the road. It’s more mainstream, throughout. The title track started in a cab ride through a frigid Minneapolis and the driver’s story about an apparition between skyscrapers, around three or four in the morning, during snow storms. Someone else told him the “Spirit of Minnie” has to do with snow “interacting with magnetic entities.” The ninth and final song, *Insect*, places listeners back in our human condition.

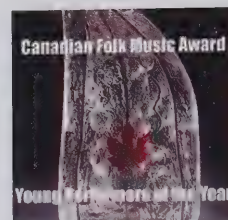
Will produces his own highly creative, easy-to-find music videos. If this is a first introduction to Varley’s musical journey, stepping into his fascinating, ongoing evolution will stop you in your tracks.

— By Bruce Mason





# Introducing Moscow Apartment



**T**hey're young, exuberant, and anything but steeped in the ways of the entertainment industry, yet Brigid Fry and Pascale Padilla are already trenchant musical observers of both the exterior and interior worlds.

The Toronto duo, neither of whom is yet 17 years old, are making a mark for themselves as Moscow Apartment. In 2017, they were voted Young Performers of the Year (sponsored by Penguin Eggs) at the Canadian Folk Music Awards and Best Young Songwriters prize at the Toronto Independent Music Awards.

Small wonder they're getting attention. For example, *Annie*—the song is on an eponymous EP, *Moscow Apartment*'s sole recording venture to date, and available via YouTube—showcases a musically accomplished kiss-off to the business interests that use body image to rob young women of self-worth in the interest of turning a profit. "In this society, we're taught that not liking the way you look is more valuable than liking the way you look," says Padilla, who in the video rebels angrily against the beauty industry and its attempted ownership of women's bodies. "Teens are in a really insecure time, and this song is about that insecurity and fighting back against that."

Elsewhere on the EP, the two dive into relationships. In *Caroline*, they explore anger, distance, and misunderstanding in a family situation. "It's a story song," says Fry. "A songwriter can come up with imaginary stories." Adds her band mate, "When we're writing, it's about feelings. When we put a name or a story on those, it's easier to write about." And easier, she agrees, for the listener to engage with the song.

The two, who teamed up as Moscow Apartment in early 2017, met in the Toronto kids' choir VIVA! Youth Singers. The idea of forming a duo was promoted by their parents, who held a dinner to encourage the musical union. The idea took hold and the two young women—Padilla is in Grade 10 and Fry in Grade 9—named themselves after a photo of an old man outside a bleak Russian apartment building that struck a chord with them both. They soon found themselves carving out a distinctive indie rock niche that blends folk, pop, punk, and more with enticing individual vocal forays and delicious harmonies. Their songs often start simply and then build both instrumentally and vocally.

"It's interesting—the song mimics the writing process," says Fry, referring to the way one musician will typically come up with a basic idea and then work with the other to fashion a full-blown creation. Their songs

have resulted in an enviable live-gig schedule, including a show at Toronto's storied Horseshoe Tavern earlier this year. "We were really nervous because it's such a historic venue," says Fry. But, "it was so fun!"

The two are also keenly aware that their situation is rare. "We're girls and we're younger, and you don't hear about a lot of people who are our age and gender doing this," says Padilla.

Encouraged by their school, which makes allowances for the time they need to spend on their craft, the two are forward-focused. "We'll be writing and going to a lot of festivals this summer," says Fry.

Adds Padilla, "We'll keep on keeping on."

— By Pat Langston







## Introducing

# Rosemary Lawton

When Rosemary Lawton was seven years old, a string quartet visited her school, and she fell in love with the violin. Her parents enrolled her in the Suzuki Talent Education Program (STEP), which, in addition to its classical strings program, also offered instruction in Newfoundland fiddling under the direction of fiddle expert Christina Smith.

"I learned a lot of Newfoundland tunes and really loved them," says Lawton. "I feel very fortunate to have been a part of the STEP fiddlers; I didn't realize how rare it was to have a program like that until I was older."

Lawton completed a degree in music at Memorial University in 2016. That summer, she and two friends landed jobs as full-time musicians at the Anchor Inn in Twillingate, playing for tourists and imparting local culture through music and storytelling.

Away from St. John's with no access to wifi, television, or a car of her own, she walked down to the beach during the day and would sit and play music.

"I had done a composition course and an orchestration course in music school, and learned how to arrange for string quartets, orchestras, jazz bands, everything. I had an affinity for it, I really enjoyed it. I would go down to the beach—there were no distractions—and I would work on harmony parts for tunes."

Inspired by the bucolic setting of one of the island's loveliest outposts, Lawton eventually amassed enough material for a recording. To bring her project to life, she approached producer Ian Foster, and recruited an excellent team of musicians conversant in classical and traditional styles.

Entitled *Painted Glass*, the six-track EP, released in 2017, presents a young artist with strong instrumental skills, a compelling voice, and a knack for creating arrangements that are authentic and fresh.

Lawton also strikes a nice balance with repertoire representing Newfoundland's musical past and present: "I wanted to put some traditional tunes in there, but also felt the need to do some that sounded more modern. I talked to Dave Panting, and he was kind enough to allow me to do a set he had written that had not yet been recorded. Also, in one of my courses in school I had to write a sound track for a short film, and that's where the *Movie Jigs* came from."

Lawton is currently pursuing a degree in music education, but is planning a busy year of performances. This summer, she is travelling to Portugal with the Celtic Fiddlers and doing gigs with a country band named Perfect Strangers. A tour supporting her EP is also in the works.

"I had the whole band play the CD for the launch and a couple of gigs, but it's too expensive to tour Newfoundland with such a big group, so I'm working with a guitar player named Taylor Wall to present a toned-down version of what's on the CD."

Lawton is also continuing to write, and has already started work on a full-length CD of original music.

– By Jean Hewson





# Introducing OktoEcho



Listening to the OktoEcho ensemble is like travelling through time and space, from Montreal to the Middle East and back to the Canadian north. The ensemble fuses modern sounds with traditional music, creating a unique homage to Western and Eastern styles.

OktoEcho was founded in 2001 as a not-for-profit with the aim of enriching community through diversity and multiculturalism. Its membership can be as few as four and as many as 22 musicians/improvisers, depending on the project. Instrumentation ranges from Scandinavian and Japanese flutes to cello, electronics, voice, and percussion.

Katia Makdissi-Warren, artistic director and composer, created OktoEcho because, she says, “I could not find a music ensemble corresponding to what I was trying to express in my compositions.” Influenced by her French-Canadian and Lebanese roots, she explains, “I started with the first fusion close to my heart and culture—Western and Middle Eastern music.”

*Saimaniq*, which means peace in Inuktitut, is the ensemble’s third album and shows Makdissi-Warren’s deep love of northern music. Here, Inuit throat singing (katajjaq) is layered into OktoEcho’s already rich and multilayered soundscapes. The album is meant to evoke desert and ice, to bridge cultures, and to fuse contemporary and traditional sounds.

“I like creating new music worlds but I like them deeply rooted,” says Makdissi-Warren. When creating a composition based on multiple cultures and musical traditions, it’s important to learn about the “other” and to share cultural backgrounds. “The meeting between human beings is at the heart of creation.”

Makdissi-Warren started work on *Saimaniq* in 2013, using meetings, improvisational workshops, and a research team to facilitate the creative collaboration of musicians from diverse cultures and who came from oral, written, or improvisational traditions.

Ensemble members wrestled with questions such as, “how could electronics be introduced to reinforce Inuit throat singing?” The answer to this question came, in part, by combining the work of throat singers Nina Segalowitz and Lydia Etok with sound throat singing archives from the Canadian Museum of History and the Avataq Cultural Institute.

“I wanted to express the beauty and richness of Inuit culture and, at the same time, wanted to pay tribute to the Inuit ancestors,” Makdissi-Warren says. “I wanted to hear women’s voices who participated in this ancestral transmission chain. I also wanted to express the nostalgia and the sorrow of a whole section of the population desecrated and deprived of their culture.”

OktoEcho’s recordings have had some critical acclaim. The ensemble’s first two albums, *OktoEcho* (2009) and *Le 5e Route Bleue* (2010) were nominated for Opus and Canadian Folk awards. The ensemble has performed at the World Arab Festival, the Séfarad Festival, the Off Jazz festival, the Montreal First Peoples festival, and the Babel festival. Makdissi-Warren, who composes for theatre, dance, and film, was commissioned to create the score for the multimedia gallery in the world’s tallest building, Dubai’s Burj Khalifa (829.8 metres from ground to tip) as well as the soundtrack for TEDxBeirut, 2014.

*Saimaniq*’s official launch is on April 4 in Montreal’s La Sala Rossa. Check out [OktoEcho.com](http://OktoEcho.com) as well as the soundtrack for TEDxBeirut, 2014.

– By Jackie Bell







# Introducing Joshua Hyslop

**I** catch up with Joshua Hyslop in mid-February, just a few days before *Nettwerk* is set to release *Echos*. After six shows opening for SYML across Europe, the singer/songwriter is strolling Amsterdam's streets—exploring the Dutch capital before a headlining gig that night. He's been wearing the same pair of jeans for 19 days.

"They are black, so no one can tell!" he laughs. Following our conversation, Hyslop plans to visit a couple of his favourite cafes and a cool tobacco shop to repair a pipe he bought last time he was here.

Following the release of *In Deepest Blue* (2015), Hyslop became a streaming star, averaging more than 1.6 million monthly Spotify listeners. It is apropos I chat with the singer/songwriter as he ambles around Amsterdam; this canal city epitomizes, for Hyslop, how artists can use the ever-changing music industry to their advantage—and the tools it offers—to find fans and then bring them your music.

"When I first signed to *Nettwerk*, Spotify was not a thing," he explains. "As far as streaming goes, it is handy to see where people are listening to your music. The first time I came to Amsterdam was because Spotify analytics showed I had a big following here; it's definitely a tool for growing your business and reaching a wider audience."

On *Echos*' 11 cuts, Hyslop uses his gift as a writer to empathize with his friends' grief. These are storied songs that tug at one's heartstrings and are sure to further grow his audience. "I was like, 'I have no advice, and I don't know what to say; the only thing I can do is write songs'."

Hyslop did not set out to write a record with a specific theme. Most of the songs were written during a year of hardship for his peer group.

"2016, for a lot of people in my group of friends, was a pretty hard year," he recalls. "I don't know what it was, if it was something in the water, but many of my friends were going through some hard stuff."

For example, *Home*, Hyslop says, was written about good friends whose baby died of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). To get a taste, digest these contemplative lyrics:

*"In the dark / in the quiet / it's too much for me to take / to feel alone / as if there is no way out / give me peace of mind today / When the nights are long / And the days go on / I don't feel the same anymore."*

Another pair of songs (*Long Way Down*, and *Fall*), Hyslop penned about two sets of couples who were close to him who were in the middle of divorces.

Besides writing about others, Hyslop also looked inward. "I had my own things going on and this is reflected in songs such as *Say It Again* and *What's To Come*."

As a songwriter, Hyslop says that his best writing (as *Echos* confirms) comes when he just lets go.

"It's not an out-of-body experience but it's definitely a disconnect between what you are saying and what my journal says," he concludes. "Often, I go back and look at my songs when they are finished and say, 'Man, that was my subconscious speaking...it just needed to come out and it did'. If I set out to articulate something it would be cheesy, so it's always better when I just write...these are the words that I feel and let's see where it goes."

— By David McPherson





# Calgary 2018

November 30 - December 1

30 novembre - 1<sup>er</sup> décembre



## Canadian Folk Music Awards

*2018 Canadian Folk Music Awards*

Calgary, November 30 - December 1

Submissions open April 3

Early bird submissions  
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*Prix de musique folk canadienne 2018*

Calgary 30 novembre - 1<sup>er</sup> décembre

Les soumissions  
seront ouvertes le  
3 avril

Soumissions au  
tarif préférentiel  
date limite le  
30 avril



## Prix de musique folk canadienne



[folkawards.ca](http://folkawards.ca)

[prixfolk.ca](http://prixfolk.ca)



**R**eleased on Ani DiFranco's Righteous Babe Records in 2010, Anaïs Mitchell's album *Hadestown* draws from the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, in which Orpheus makes a perilous journey to the underworld to rescue Eurydice. Expanding on the songs from her recording, Mitchell has now created a gripping, fast-paced, Depression-era, folk opera that made its Canadian premiere at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton on Nov. 15, with Mitchell fine-tuning her script right up to curtain call. Questions by Roddy Campbell.

**What initially attracted you to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice?**

I was attracted to the characters, especially Hades as an industrial boss/king, and Orpheus as a dreamer, an artist who believes that if he writes a song beautiful enough he can change the Way It Is. There's also something about the tragic ending, which is somewhat impenetrable, and the fact that we celebrate Orpheus not because he succeeded in his endeavour, but because he tried.

**When you recorded your album *Hadestown* did you have a musical in mind?**

*Hadestown* actually began as a DIY community theatre project in the state of Vermont, before the album. It was a much shorter, more abstract version of the tale, and it was staged by a radical, rural theatre artist named Ben Matchstick, featured arrangements by Michael Chorney (who is still involved with the project), and all the parts were sung by friends of ours from Vermont. So the album was not the origin of *Hadestown*, but many of the songs underwent significant revision during the album era. And I always wanted to see it staged again, and more than that, to expand the piece into a full-length professional show.

**Listening to the cast singing your songs, what goes through your mind?**

I am in utter awe of actors and the depth they can find in a word, a line, a melody. It is exponentially different, hearing the songs from the mouths of actors, and I'm so grateful that I get to work with them.

**Why set it in the Depression?**

*Hadestown* is not historically accurate or tied exactly to any time or place, but it does take a lot of inspiration from the Depression era. The above-ground world is an unpredictable, impoverished, sometimes dangerous place—a



## Anaïs Mitchell

place of man-made natural disasters—like the Dust Bowl. The below-ground world is something like a company town, a place of relative security, but also soulless, exploitative work. The trains, the mines, the migrants, the kinds of folk music I take inspiration from, the kinds of Jazz Era stuff Michael Chorney and Todd Sickafoose (Todd is an additional arranger/orchestrator, and album producer), take inspiration from, all of these things find fertile ground in the Depression Era.

**How did it wind up in Edmonton?**

We were looking, after our first Off-Broadway run at NYTW, to find a home where we could develop the show further, have room to explore, before trying our hand at a commercial production. I never expected Edmonton to be our destination! But the folks at The Citadel reached out and were very consistent, persuasive, warm, smart, passionate, all of the things. And strangely—or not—during the album era of *Hadestown*, a similar thing happened where several Albertan arts organizations reached out about bringing *Hadestown* to Alberta—it was never on our radar, but their persistence, and their holistic competence, made us say yes! So I have the feeling that the Albertan arts community has its ear to the ground and is keen to make things happen...

**Changes were made right up to the last**

**minute in Edmonton; are you now satisfied with the outcome?**

Oh, you know—I'll be changing the show until the minute we open commercially! Someone told me "musicals are never finished, only abandoned". I, and we, made a lot of changes in the lead-up to Edmonton, and then in the hothouse situation of the actual production and previews, many new things became clear and had to be addressed... Part of what we're working on is a meta thing of how to place this show gracefully between the poles of literal storytelling and concert/tone poem. So a lot of that is writing, but a lot of it is also sets, costumes, choreography, staging, lights, and sound, and so on...

**Do you have any further projects in mind for musical theatre?**

I started working on another musical a couple of years ago, but I find I don't have much bandwidth for anything but *Hadestown* at the moment. I may do more, I'd love to do more, if the conditions presented themselves—but I'm also really longing for a return to the singer/songwriter identity/album cycle that I called my scene for many years before entering the theatre world. I think I gotta make a regular ol' record or two first.





## Alistair Anderson

**He makes landmark traditional recordings when not wrapping his concertina around Kate Bush.**

**By Colin Irwin**

**T**he man is an inspiration. A folk music treasure. An icon. Even, if you will, a fully formed, bona fide legend.

Not, however, that the engagingly modest concertina and Northumbrian pipe master Alistair Anderson would ever subscribe to such hyperbole... "I've been very lucky," is about as far down this road as he is willing to entertain.

But examine his CV and gawp in wonder

at his achievements. How he emerged from early Newcastle folk pioneers, the High Level Ranters, to embark on an unlikely solo career and take the hitherto unsung concertina beyond previously unimagined horizons of popular appeal, profile and musical exploration.

Interspersing his energetic, imaginative playing with fulsome stories of the musicians who passed on the tunes and stories, he became a mainstay of folk clubs and an inspiration to those who followed. Seamlessly embedded into the traditional music associated with the landscapes of his native Northumberland, his 1984 self-composed instrumental suite *Steel Skies* remains a significant landmark, cited by so many of the bright young things bursting from all corners of Britain as their revelatory Road-to-Damascus moment.

He's gone on since to explore numerous seemingly alien territories, composing and working with string quartets, jazz musicians, Chinese ensembles, African dance troupes, youth orchestras, classical musicians, and rock stars such as Sting. There were trailblazing collaborations with jazz trombonist Annie Whitehead and a memorable tour with Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett. And if you haven't seen Alistair with his concertina wrapped round Kate Bush while she sings Elton John's *Rocket Man*, Google it INSTANTLY (it also features uilleann piper Davey Spillane).

And if all this wasn't enough in itself to raise him to godlike status, the current scene owes him plenty, not least through setting up the Folkworks summer camps that were so influential in igniting the enthusiasm of budding



young folk musicians, and then in 2001 devising England's first folk and traditional degree course at Newcastle University.

All this while remaining a passionate musician, composing tunes and suites, releasing albums and playing gigs. Indeed, he's currently back on the road with a vengeance, playing with young guitarist/banjo player Dan Walsh ("serious fun") and Northlands, the band he's put together with outstanding guitarist Ian Stephenson, fiddle player Sophy Ball, and singer/flautist Sarah Hayes, all of whom he's known since their early teens and to some degree has tutored.

"Ian and Sophy did the folk degree course and are very inventive musicians, and Sarah has long been one of my favourite singers since she was 14 when she sang in the cattle market at Rothbury Festival; such a tiny figure doing these big songs and also a great flute player. I'd had several bands I'd put together for specific projects, but decided I wanted a band that wasn't dependent on something I was writing...Ian, Sophy, and Sarah were top of my list and excitingly they all said yes. It's very exciting playing with them."

Something else not widely known about Alistair Anderson is that he's Canadian. Yep, Canadian. Sort of...

"I'm half Canadian. My dad was from Canada. I'm the son of an economic migrant who farmed in the Depression of the '30s and came to England around 1935. I love going to Canada. I used to tour Canada and the States a lot. I remember one of the early tours around 1975 I played at Edmonton folk club, which was in a church hall. It hadn't been going very long then and when I arrived there it was packed. They said they'd never had a crowd like it. What happened was my aunts had sent word round and all my relations and family friends came. My dad had five brothers and he was the only one who came to England so that line of my family is still in Canada."

Alistair's dad played a bit of mandolin. Nothing too fancy, but he could hold a tune and entertained the family playing the popular songs of the day...and Alistair's first experience of playing was on his dad's mandolin, accompanying a mate who played blues guitar. How he gravitated to concertina is quite a story...

"I had another mate that I used to go to school with each morning and sitting in their front room was this concertina. I liked the look of it and his grandma let me have a go and eventually sold it to me. A Wheatstone. It's the same one I play today—and I gave the mandolin to Dave Richardson (of Boys of the Lough). My mate's grandma had been a seamstress who worked in the west end of Newcastle and

she'd get the horse-drawn bus into work. She'd see this boy at the bus stop with a leather case and one day she asked him what was in the case and he showed her this concertina. After that they started walking out and eventually got married, so it's lovely to think that my concertina was responsible for getting two people together. Once every few years his great-great-granddaughter will turn up at a gig and say, 'Are you still playing my great-great-grandad's concertina?' and I say yes.

"It's great. It's a great instrument. I do have other ones, and some have a warmer feel, but this one is truly dynamic. I've got one that's a real Rolls Royce, but this one is a Harley Davidson. It was made in the late 1890s...I've had four or five sets of bellows and a few new strings and pads but all the reeds are original. They were so carefully made they should see me out. Accordion reeds would never last that long."

Inveterately modest and unassuming, he consistently gives his most fulsome credit to the Northumbrian musicians of old who encouraged and enthused him, notably the legendary piper Billy Pigg, harmonica player Will Atkinson, fiddle-playing Cheviot shepherd Will Taylor, and small piper Joe Hutton.

"I was very fortunate to meet these old guys. I was hugely influenced by them, but I don't play like them and neither would they have expected me to. They themselves evolved. Will Taylor played very differently in the 1970s to the way he'd played in the 1950s. I took him to a big festival once—it may have been

Cambridge—with a wide range of music, and driving back afterwards he was too honest to say he liked it all, but he said, 'I've never heard any music yet that I can't learn something from.' I thought that was amazing coming from a guy in his late 80s, but it's very true."

Anderson's compositions and playing style have always been closely associated with the dramatic landscapes surrounding him in Northumberland in the northeast of England, though he points to the fact that a lot of the music of the area originally came from Scotland and Ireland, even including an assortment of tunes from the south of England.

"With this music the connection to place is there and it's real and the connection to people is very real, but the style of playing is much to do with the people who dance. A lot of those dances had no connection with folk music and people in Northumberland dance differently to people from over the border in Scotland and you slow things down to emphasize the rhythm or whatever. That contributes to a strong sense of identity in the area and the distinct regional characteristics, but it's also utterly flexible, which makes it so fascinating."

Still full of ideas, still infectiously enthusiastic, still brilliant—there is clearly no possibility that Mr. Anderson is planning to retire any day soon.

"The thing is, I can never decide whether I've been on holiday for the last 50 years or I've been working 365 days a year. But then I think...what's the difference?"







## Sue Foley

**The Ottawa-born guitar slinger's first album in a decade features several iconic Texas bluesmen.**  
**By Roger Levesque**

**A** little wear is starting to show on Sue Foley's pink paisley Telecaster guitar, but as the owner heads into mid-career, coming full circle to her star-making debut in Austin, TX, some 30 years ago, Foley's blues is the sound of satisfaction.

With a touch of tongue-in-cheek, the Ottawa-born singer and guitar slinger chose to dub her first real solo album in over a decade *The*

*Ice Queen*. And after a few of her guitar licks send a chill up your spine, it's nice to know that she is a warm, friendly individual who still loves making music.

"I used to make albums every 12 or 18 months but I think I needed a refresher. *The Ice Queen* was a long time coming but I think it was good to step back and try something else for a while. I'm in the moment now, I'm enjoying playing, and I'm thrilled about the album."

That title starts with her roots in the frozen north. It's a song, too, a killer, spare trio ballad about the virtues of staying "cool and detached" when you're being chased. Finally, it's a nod to the late bluesman Albert (Ice Man) Collins, a Texas legend who invited her on stage early on.

It would be impossible to forget her ties with

Austin, TX, and Antone's, the club and record label that launched her career stateside at age 21. After the long-closed Antone's venue was re-opened in the new year of 2016, those memories were bound to come flooding back.

Foley's last decade was marked by collaborative efforts with the trio Time Bomb, and a duo with Peter Karp, two years based in Tennessee, and another two years in North Carolina. She was drawn back to Austin in late 2016 to make a little bit of history when her old friend, keyboard player Mike Flanigin, invited her to play the revived Antone's.

"I was away for a long time so when he contacted me it felt like old-home week. We all started out there, hung out there, learned how to play blues there. That started the whole thing rolling."



To her delight, Foley found herself onstage in an all-star date called *The Jungle Show*, the only woman in a lineup of Texas blues veterans including guitarists Jimmy Vaughan and Billy (ZZ Top) Gibbons, drummer Chris Layton, and Flanigin on B3 organ.

"You could feel the history of Texas blues was so present. Jimmy Vaughan and Billy Gibbons are both encyclopedic when it comes to their knowledge of guitar styles and blues styles. When we were rehearsing for those shows, just pulling out tunes, I had to wonder, 'how many songs do these guys know?' It's insane."

She admits the intimidation factor is still there.

"It was a thrill and I was intimidated. I still look up to these guys as heroes. That never leaves you. But now I can stand beside them onstage and when I'm in my element, I can hold my own."

In January 2017, Foley took it a step farther, spending five days in the studio making *The Ice Queen*, with Flanigin on keyboards and producing. Some of the backup, such as guitarist Derek O'Brien and drummer George Rains, had been there for her first Antone's release, *Young Girl Blues* in 1991.

Most of the album was caught live in one room, vocals included, with minimal overdubs.

"I wanted that vibe. I'm a live player, so I like to play and respond to others in the moment."

The biggest engineering challenge happened when The Texas Horns (Mark Kazanoff plus-four) showed up for *If I Have Forsaken You*. Charlie Sexton from The Arc Angels was the first Texas icon to pull a cameo, sharing his guitar and vocals on the opener *Come To Me* and the next, *81*. Jimmy Vaughan stopped by for a tasty mid-tempo shuffle called *The Lucky Ones*, and Billy Gibbons growls in on Foley's look at romantic illusions, a co-write with Flanigin dubbed *Fool's Gold*.

Covers include a rollicking take on Bessie Smith's hit *Send Me To The 'Lectric Chair*, ("a perfect metaphor for how you feel when you're in the middle of an intense breakup"). The Carter family's *Cannonball Blues* is a lovely acoustic afterthought to close, but they all feel like Foley songs.

"You know, I don't write from fiction," she admits, hinting at the trials of life's ups and downs. "Everything I write, I have experienced on some level. I just try to work with my truth."

*Death Of A Dream* introduces three striking, spare acoustic tracks near the end, with the real surprise, her spicy solo flamenco piece *The Dance*, using a nylon-stringed guitar. It's not her first venture out of electric blues. Foley will

remind you she made the eclectic acoustic album *Change* in 2004, and she throws occasional acoustic numbers into her sets. She came to love Spanish guitar after seeing Charo on television as a kid.

After performing, and then planning, recording, and mixing *The Ice Queen*, Foley wound up moving back to Austin, though she continues to split her life in Toronto, too, feeling the love of her Canadian fans. She's won 17 Maple Blues Awards over the years, along with a Juno, and several nominations from the International Blues Music Awards.

Canada's Stony Plain label released *The Ice Queen* but it was also produced with help from a Kickstarter campaign, and I wondered whether she found the business of recording easier or harder.

"Yes," she laughs. "It's both. When I started out, there was an infrastructure, but we raised the money for this album and I've never done that before. It was profound to get all that support, but right now you have to do so many jobs you never had to do before. Now, every musician I know spends eight hours a day at their computer."

For a moment Foley waxes nostalgic about the days when she could just pick up her guitar and hit the road to tour, "when there were no cell phones or computers to track you".

She blames her love of blues on three older brothers who exposed her to Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones and other blues-based rock as they were growing up in Ottawa in the 1970s. After starting guitar at 13, she made her first performance at 16, and started touring after high school. Foley was living in Vancouver when an Antone's roadshow played there.

"As soon as I saw that show I had to go to Austin. I didn't know how."

She sent a demo to the Austin record label and nightclub, and Texas won over The Ice Queen. Her ambitions were pretty simple:

"I just wanted to play like the guys do, and to play in clubs. I felt like I proved myself when I wound up in Texas. I thought, 'I must really be able to play if they're accepting me down there'."

Arguably, Foley was one of the pioneers, one of the few women of her generation out there playing hot electric blues in a largely male bastion of the music business.

"There still aren't a whole lot of us. I definitely had to prove that I could handle myself in pretty rough platforms, playing in biker bars when you're 20 years old. But I developed a pretty tough exterior early on. I knew I could play and the playing transcends everything, gender and culture."



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## Laura Cortese and the Dance Cards

**Nothing is off limits for this Boston-based quartet that fuses folk with soul, country, and R&B.**  
**J. Poet**

“I approach music as a means of connection,” Laura Cortese says, speaking from her home in Boston. “I like the sense of belonging I get with other musicians, in the studio or onstage, and the bond I feel with an audience, with people listening and responding, completing a circuit. I think everyone wants to be in touch with something bigger than themselves.

“I feel that sense of belonging when I go

home to San Francisco. I don’t live there anymore, but California taught me what home can mean. The rest of my life has been about establishing those connections elsewhere.”

Thoughts about home and community are the inspiration for the songs on *California Calling*, the first album by Laura Cortese and the Dance Cards. Since she graduated from the Berklee School of Music, the singer, fiddler, and songwriter has played with Uncle Earl, Pete Seeger, Band of Horses, and other artists, as well as making seven albums, as a solo artist and as a member of various ensembles. *California Calling* is her first record as both a bandleader and group member.

“Prior to my last album [*Into the Dark*, 2013], I was thinking a lot about how I wanted to present myself as an artist and what I wanted to

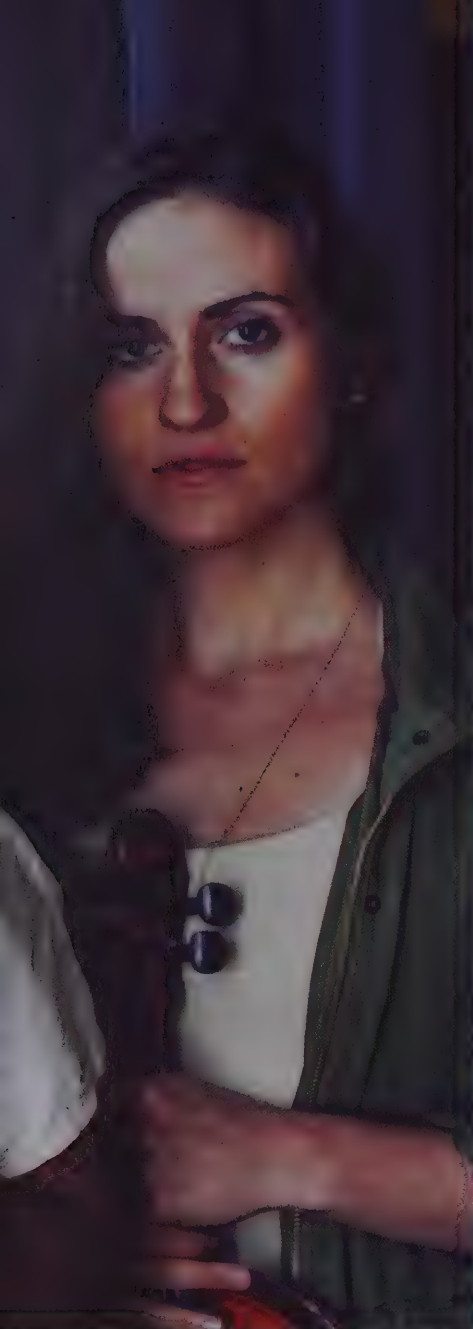
say. What felt the most authentic was the music that came to me when I made *Into the Dark*. *California Calling* explores that sound more deeply.”

Cortese toured internationally to support *Into the Dark*, with a rotating cast of musicians, eventually finding three players that gave her that we’re-all-in-it-together feeling—cello player Valerie Thompson, fiddler Jenna Moynihan, and stand-up bassist Natalie Bohrn. As soon as they got together, they started building arrangements for the songs that would make up *California Calling*.

“We had retreats in Boston, Montreal, and Iceland, taking time to create music that was a representation of the four of us.”

The album was recorded with producer Sam Kassirer (Lake Street Dive, Joy Kills Sorrow)





test out the drones—little clusters of notes—then play them live in the studio together. It was one of the most fun parts of the recording process.”

The album has a mix of traditional, classical, and pop, with a hint of rock’n’roll that isn’t overly obvious. “A lot of conscious thought goes into the arrangements. We’re always thinking about creating a sound you’ll get lost in, something that will inspire empathy. We listen to a lot of traditional folk, but I grew up with Otis Redding on vinyl. My first favourite was Elvis—on cassette then—when I was 12, on to U2 and entranced by their soundscape. Each Dance Card has a connection to a wide range of music. Val played in a progressive rock band. It all goes into you and finds a way to come out in your music. It’s actually quite organic.”

The music on *California Calling* is full of light but the songs still have a melancholy core. The vocal harmonies are alternately lilting and solemn, as are the orchestral strings that provide an expansive backdrop to the proceedings.

“We want you to experience this music in your body,” Cortese says. “You can drift off into an ethereal orchestral trance or pop up out of your seat and start dancing. The cool thing with the violin is, you can do both.”

*The Low Hum*, the album opener, combines the quartet’s tender harmonies with ambient banjo and the tone of a disconsolate, droning cello to express the poignant heartache of lost love. *Three Little Words* has a bodhran-like percussion line and Cortese playing a mournful Irish/Appalachian lead to compliment a brooding tale of ambivalent love. She contributes a country- flavoured lead vocal to *Stockholm*, a tune that sounds like a folky R&B ballad sent

**“We want you to experience this music in your body. You can drift off into an ethereal orchestral trance or pop up out of your seat and start dancing. The cool thing with the violin is, you can do both.”**

into overdrive by a thumping bass line, while *Pace Yourself* has a sensual, funky 2/4 pulse to compliment an impressionistic lyric that implies wild physical abandon.

*Swing and Turn (Jubilee)* is the album’s only traditional fiddle tune, but the band turns it inside out by slowing the verse down to a glacial crawl to accentuate the lyrics. “This is usually done as a sing along,” Cortese says, “but the words are so surreal and weird, almost obsessive: ‘If I had a needle and thread, fine as I could sew / I’d sew my true love to my side and down the creek we’d go’. I wanted to accentuate them with the halftime verses and an up-tempo chorus.”

The traces of R&B, country, and rock that lurk in the background hint at what a louder Dance Cards album might sound like. Has Cortese ever thought about plugging in and rocking out?

“I have played my fiddle through an amp. I really loved it, so nothing is off limits. That said, there are many bands based around electric guitar, but not many doing what we do. This feels like the right place to be to express myself right now. Maybe I’ll pick up electric guitar sometime, but right now I’m pretty bad at it.”

at a studio he built in a farmhouse in rural Maine.

“A lot of it was recorded live. Sam would listen to an arrangement and hear something in one of the instruments that he’d like to enhance by doubling the line or adding another instrument. He was able to bring out the interplay between strings and voices and take it deeper and wider. He played up our cinematic sound.

“We’d spend the bulk of the day recording live. In the evening, we’d listen to what we recorded the day before and have a brainstorming session to see what was special about each track and what we could do to highlight it. We created our own glass harmonica, to add textures that were not our voices or instruments. We filled glasses with water, soaped up our fingers, and rubbed them around the rims. We’d



Laura Cortese and the Dance Cards





## Beppe Gambetta

### Doc Watson changed this Italian guitar master's life; now he sings in four languages and covers Giuseppe Verdi.

By Roger Levesque

**B**eing a master musician is just the first part for Beppe Gambetta. After making music over 50 years now, he has a broader vision.

"I continue to do research on old, beautiful things that need to be rediscovered," he explained in a recent conversation that found him on tour in California.

We're in his debt as the Italian's "research" had led him to the New World and back, to pull varied musical streams into a new light.

For the latest evidence look to Gambetta's *Short Stories* (Borealis Records), which finds the eclectic guitar man exploring traditions from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, singing songs in four languages. At 63, after nearly 30 years of recording, it is one of his most international statements.

Look for nods to old Italy in an aria by Giuseppe Verdi, and to 20th century Genoa on *Jamin-a*, a cover of the city's revered folksong icon, Fabrizio De Andre. There's a French pop tune in German, a nod to life on the road, and multiple angles on his New World fascination for bluegrass, including a medley of Doc Watson tunes. Whatever the style, it's a fusion of all things Gambetta.

To trace these disparate threads start with Giuseppe (Beppe) Gambet-

ta's upbringing in the northern Italian port city of Genoa, a city open to global influences for centuries.

His parents were enthusiastic classical fans and gave him a classical guitar at 11. He remembers Genoa's music scene then was mostly about singer/songwriters, and his own interests ran more to Led Zeppelin or hard-to-find recordings of American folk streams. An album that featured Pete Seeger and Doc Watson at the Newport Folk Festival had a huge impact on him.

"It was like falling in love instantly. There was something about how they generated rhythmic solutions with such beauty and simplicity."

Years later in the late 1980s on his first trips to North America, Gambetta would meet and play with that master of flatpicking, Watson ("a great gentleman") and many of his "great heroes" at festivals, artists such as Norman Blake, Tony Rice, David Grisman, and other bluegrass masters. When Watson died in 2012, Gambetta attended his funeral.

"I decided that he had changed my life so much I had to give my farewell. There was an open casket and I touched his right arm, thinking about all the music this man had made."

But before Gambetta made his American invasion he was exploring these obsessions at home. Writing transcriptions from records in his teens and 20s, he published his first Italian book on flatpicking guitar styles in 1983. Intrigued by Leo Kotke and Stefan Grossman, he began investigating fingerpicking guitar, too. After starting out in rock bands in his teens, he eventually founded an Italian group dedicated to American bluegrass in 1978 called Red Wine.

He recalls visiting southern states such as Georgia as early as 1985 but the most significant trip in advancing his career came in 1989. Back



then, it was possible to fly around the U.S. for only \$400 on “standby” status for 24 days. On that trip, connections in America enabled him to borrow one of the first portable digital recorders and the fates were set.

While Gambetta was still learning to speak English, music served as his ambassador and he met up with players on the festival circuit such as Norman Blake, Mike Marshall, Dan Crary, David Grier, and more, veterans who were intrigued by this Italian who had such a surprising facility for bluegrass. While he admits he was “too intimidated” to approach Watson and Rice, he was able to record enough to create his first album, *Dialogs*. It speaks well for the record to note that years later, he would find out it was being bootlegged in China complete with liner notes in Mandarin.

That set the pattern which remains to this day, of Gambetta’s regular visits to the U.S. and Canada, now several times a year, often tied to collaborative performances at festivals, and sometimes to full-length recordings.

Gambetta says those first trips to North America were essential for getting down the fine points of bluegrass technique, and he was entertained with cultural contrasts. Thanks to *Dialogs*, his reputation was growing in Europe, too, and in 1989 when Eastern Europe was still referred to as the “Iron Curtain” he would find himself playing for a crowd of 25,000 in Pilsen, in then Czechoslovakia.

Over the years, the balance of fascination and research would sway here and there as Gambetta incorporated American, Italian, Ukrainian, Celtic, and other elements. In 1995 his first studio disc for an American label, Green Linnet, the eclectic *Good News From Home* (produced by Mike Marshall), showed his maturing artistry, even touching on Gypsy guitar and blues.

“Every kind of acoustic music was like a treasure to discover, but by 1995 I was starting to develop beyond just being a European copy of American players like Doc Watson. I started to be myself and to compose and arrange a little. At the same time, I was inspired to research the history of Italian and European folk music.”

*Serenata* (1997) was a collaboration with Carlo Alonzo, his first serious look at older Italian string traditions. *Synergia* (2000) caught a series of concert appearances with Dan Crary, this time on European soil, dedicated to the repertoire of Doc Watson. *Traversata* (2001) bridged continents in another way, covering Italian music in America as recent as Nino Rota’s theme for *The Godfather*, featuring Carlo Alonzo and David Grisman as Gambetta played a specially built hybrid harp guitar.

The collective Men Of Steel (that is, steel-string guitar) found him in the company of California’s Crary, Canada’s Don Ross and Scotland’s Tony McManus for two eclectic albums. Gambetta’s friendship with McManus (now based in Ontario, Canada) blossomed further on the 2015 album *Round Trip*, issued by Borealis as the duo started touring together.

Today the guitar master spends up to 250 days a year on the road, so much of it in North America that he and his wife got a small apartment in New Jersey for their home away from Genoa.

Gambetta’s service to music also reaches beyond performing, including an annual flatpicking workshop he has hosted in Slovenia for 23 years now. Meanwhile, May will mark the 18th annual Acoustic Nights fest in Genoa. Organized with his wife, Federica, it features great string players in a thousand-seat theatre and has been broadcast by Italian Radio for five years now. This year’s fest includes Canada’s James Keelaghan, among others.

A brief reference in Gambetta’s notes for *Short Stories* mentions the “madness of the world”. He admits he was thinking mostly about the chaos of making and marketing music in a time of changing technology, but there’s a bigger picture.

“There’s political madness, almost like nature has some sickness that comes spontaneously. In travelling with music, we hope that music is pushing human relations to a better place.”







## Jolie Holland & Sam Parton

**These former Be Good Tanyas reunite as a duo to record a new disc largely inspired by the poet William Blake.**

**By Tony Montague**

**T**he spark that ignited the friendship between Jolie Holland and Samantha Parton 20 years ago came from a pair of boots on the sidewalk of East Vancouver's Commercial Drive.

As aspiring young musician and songwriter Samantha was ambling along the 'hood's cultural artery, her bespoke footwear caught the eye of aspiring young musician and songwriter Jolie, as she was working in La Quena, a coffee house and small-stage venue, now a tattoos-and-piercings parlour.

"I was wearing these boots someone made for me, some hippy in Idaho, and Jolie yelled out a compliment about them," Samantha recalls. "I'd just got back from Texas and New Orleans where I'd been living and playing music, so I recognized the Texas accent. And we started talking."

They discovered so much common ground—even down to owning the same make and colour of guitar. "I'd been playing with Trish [Klein] a little bit, which was the seed of The [Be Good] Tanyas," says Jolie. "Someone was doing a documentary on women musicians, and we were both interviewed. Then I invited Sam to play with us and at that point the trio really took on a life. Our first gig was a benefit at La Quena, when I remember this woman got up onstage and pierced her lips and sewed them together."

A year later, Frazey Ford joined The Be Good Tanyas, and the trio became a quartet for a while. But after playing on their huge-hit debut *Blue Horse* [2001], Jolie went back to Texas and embarked on a six-album solo career.

"I put out my last record, *Wine Dark Sea*, in 2014, and then was thinking of doing a duo project. So I made a list of people; Samantha was on the top, and I called her."

"I wasn't doing music at all," Samantha remembers. "I was recovering from two car accidents, and surgery for a brain aneurism. I'd had this cascade of health issues, and at the time Jolie called I was having an attack where I'd lost the feeling in both legs. It was pretty scary. I was dealing with all this pain and trying to figure out that long, long road to



recovery. It caused a bit of a crisis in me, like I don't know what my life is. I'd never really been ill before, and now I didn't know if I was going to be able to do music ever again.

"So I felt like the heavens opened up when a friend reached out who really knew me and who I could trust, and I just said, 'yes', because I could be honest with her about where I was at, and she would work with me from that place. Jolie came up to Vancouver and, in between my medical appointments, we sat down together. I hadn't been writing and she and I were able to access that."

Billed simply as Jolie Holland & Samantha Parton, they took to the road on a short tour of the West Coast, accompanied by Stevie Weinstein-Foner on guitar and vocal harmonies and Jared Samuel on bass and keyboards, and drummer Justin Veloso. "It was the middle of winter—really damp and piercingly cold in some places—an intense learning curve because Sam's nerve problems really react to the cold," says Jolie. "But I'm used to people in bands looking after each other."

Before long, they were ensconced in the home studio of a mutual friend in Portland, cutting *Wildflower Blues*. They had the essentials down in five days, sticking to regular office hours to avoid the overload of many recording sessions. "We were thinking a lot about The Band and The Basement Tapes [made with Bob Dylan], the looseness of that, and the harmonies," says Samantha. "We didn't want it to be too laboured."

"That's my ethos as a record producer," adds Jolie. "Make it feel alive. The first thing I hear on a recording is the level of neuroticism!"

"The whole thing happened in a way that was very fortuitous, and guided," says Samantha. "The right people were available at the right time, and the vibe was super cohesive. Those are all the elements that inform the sound."

Generic influences on *Wildflower Blues* shift from folk to blues to soul to country to soft rock, stitched together with seamless ease. The lyrics of the original songs draw inspiration from Townes van Zandt, Bob Dylan, and William Blake. The nod to the English poet and visionary of the early Romantic era is overt. Jolie has added a verse to Dylan's *Minstrel Boy* that runs: "Oh Billy's in London singing his songs / The eternal angels are singing along / And the Lion and the Tyger lying down with the Lamb / I'm gonna meet you next year in Jerusalem."

The lion and the lamb return in a line of *Johnny Said To May*, also co-written by the duo. The song—like the bucolic *Little Black Bear* and Jolie's bittersweet *The Last*—is imbued with the colours and tones of Blake's masterpiece *Songs Of Innocence And Experience*.

"I've really been focusing on Blake in the past few years and he's an integral part of a musical I'm writing," Jolie reveals. "I'm reading a thesis about him now. Descriptions of visionary experience are also on the record. *Johnny Said To May* talks about the non-dual experience of love. When we're in London, we always visit Blake's grave in Bunhill Fields."

The pair toured the U.K. in the fall and are starting to think about the next album. They won't give anything away yet, except that it will be "a real Canadiana record". Meanwhile, Jolie's been working on a benefit record for her hometown Houston, recently devastated by hurricane and floods, and the soundtrack for *Almost Home*, a movie about teenagers and homelessness in L.A. Samantha is naturally dealing with her rehabilitation, one day at a time, and involved as musician in a poetry-based project in the U.K. As for getting back on the road, "I'm still trying to figure out what I can handle. I can't think of a more challenging job for someone with pain issues than touring," she says, laughing.

The Blakean imagery of the airy and wiry title track *Wildflower Blues*, another collaboration with Jolie, catches Samantha's determined spirit: "I'm a wildflower standing in the sun / I'm a wildflower standing in the sun / Well I bust thru the cracks when the springtime comes."

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## Bird City

**It took almost 15 years to complete the lyrics for her stark and beautiful, oddly named new disc.**

**By Tom Murray**

It was record producer Scott Merritt who inadvertently came up with the title of Jenny Mitchell's latest project, *Bird City*.

The Guelph, ON-based singer/songwriter had sent 29 tracks to her friend and longtime musical associate to spark discussion on which ones would go together best on a cohesive album. Merritt responded by sending along an email that simply said "winnowing" in the subject line.

"I had to look the word up because I'd never heard it before," confesses Mitchell, a.k.a. Jenny Omnichord, answering questions about her critically acclaimed album while making a pot of sloppy joes for her two kids.

"I liked it, because it was a perfect way of describing what we were doing. We weren't trying to delete any of them, or say that one group of songs was better than another, we just wanted to pull a body of work out of them."

Merritt, who has worked in the past with Mitchell on bands such as Barmitzvah Brothers and The Burning Hell, narrowed his choices to a list that was nearly identical to Mitchell's. Recording proceeded slowly as Mitchell wrestled with a tight budget; songs developed and morphed at the speed of about three a year, the two revisiting tracks months after recording, digging into the truth of each number. A large cast of guest musicians such as Nathan Lawr (Minotaurs) and Bry Webb (Constantines) were brought in for particular parts, after which Merritt went back and winnowed (there's that term again) the song parts themselves.

What they came up with was an oddly timeless and cohesive album, considering it was recorded over three years, with many of the lyrics written over 15 years. Stark, beautiful,

atmospheric, and deeply exposed, *Bird City* is the record that Mitchell had been putting off for her entire career precisely because it made her feel so vulnerable. Putting down her name-sake omnichord and picking up the banjo and tenor guitar, Mitchell found herself wading into the deeper waters of roots music.

"I had been piling up these songs on the side of every band I was ever in," she admits. "They weren't songs I felt comfortable doing in The Bar Mitzvah Brothers or Jenny Omnichord, because they were so heartfelt and vulnerable. Heart-on-sleeve songs that I thought might get me mocked or laughed at. It's a shift I had to make, to become the sort of person who could share such things. When I was younger, I felt there wasn't any room for it because there were plenty of people doing songs like that. Then, when I hit my 30s and had a family, I felt more comfortable doing it."

The process of recording winnowing could also be compared to panning for gold, except that Mitchell finds it a problematic analogy.



"It's not as sad as that," she insists, turning it over in her head for a moment. "It's not like we didn't find room for the dirt as well. We didn't get rid of anything, and there were often other places for the weird sounds that we removed from some songs."

If *Bird City* is a major signpost in Mitchell's development as a songwriter, it also represented a major turning point in her life. The recording of it took so long that it enveloped both her breakup with longtime partner (and father of her children) producer/musician Andy Magoffin, and their reconciliation as friends and collaborators. In fact, Magoffin was on hand to provide live sound for the album release in Guelph after mastering the final version at his House of Miracles studio.

"It was incredibly special to have him there. The funny thing is that if I had recorded it sooner, we probably wouldn't have been getting along enough for him to do it. I really wanted him on this, though. There's a song on there that I wrote a day or two after the break up, and I think of him sitting there in the studio, processing as it played. I gave that one to him first before he committed, and after, he said that of course he would do it. To get his final seal of approval, well, that was magical."

*Bird City* has picked up wide acclaim for

Mitchell since its release in October 2017, but she's still uncertain as to what this means for her. As the music industry changes around her she questions whether she'll be able to tour the album very extensively, or even record a followup.

"I'm very confused about the current state of what it means to be a professional musician," she says matter-of-factly. "I'm also not sure how feasible it is to go out on the road when there are kids in the mix. It's really strange to have a record do well on campus radio, but nobody comes out to your show in, oh, Windsor. It's just weird. I feel like there are pieces of the music industry that some people have figured out how to put together that I haven't quite grasped," she laughs. "I get the old pieces of it, like booking a tour, because the Internet makes that a lot easier, but promoting a show and having people come out is very confusing to me."

With the old model broken and the new one still scattered like puzzle pieces, Mitchell ponders the age-old question of whether the hard work and lack of return is worth it. Critical acclaim and glowing magazine articles look good in the press kit but they can't be used to fill up a van. Since she's almost by definition a lifer in the business, you can probably guess her response.



Jenny Mitchell

"If there's no money, where does the money come from? How, as a mother, do I look at the money I do make and not see it as grocery money? The responsible thing is probably not to make another album if I have to scabble for the money, but the fact is that I probably won't be able not to. I'll be there, scheming, constantly scheming, to get the next one out."

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**With their Old West garb and vaudeville antics, this is not your run-of-the-mill bluegrass band.**

**By Michael Dunn**

**G**oing into their seventh year together, Regina's The Dead South are seeing the fruits of several years of hard touring, with a number of sold-out shows on their recent Western Canadian and American tours, as well as in Europe, where the band finds themselves gaining a serious foothold with audiences, though some audiences tend to be more appreciative than others.

"It was our first time (in America) touring, instead of just popping in for showcases," explains guitarist and vocalist Nate Hilts.

"A lot of people couldn't believe that we'd come out and meet them, shake their hands, and want to get to know them. They really buy into you, but they can be tough as well. We

missed the first six shows of the tour, and had to cancel because of visa issues, and we ended up with a number of...interesting messages on our social media pages, detailing how upset they were with us for not making it and how disappointed they were in us. We took it well enough I guess, and said what we could to assure them that we'd make it up to them."

The band's touring efforts in Europe are paying off as well, with sold-out gigs throughout the continent. "Not to be dismissive of other audiences, but European people really seem to like what we do. They've been some of the best crowds we've had. In Berlin, we've had to change venues three times, up to a 1,500-capacity venue to accommodate people who want tickets."

Having toured the Canadian Prairies, playing the small towns and rowdy bars, Hilts notes the difference in the European clubs they're playing. "When we first started playing there, the European folks listened really attentively, which was odd for us, because we were used to the smaller clubs and bars, and people hootin' and hollerin', and moving their feet. But

they're really attentive in Europe, they'll drive from anywhere to come see us, cross borders that they maybe shouldn't have..."

Like any band that tours extensively, the road can put a strain on membership. The Dead South experienced this in 2016 when founding banjo player Colton Crawford left the band, but Hilts says that while integrating new banjoist Eliza Doyle came easily for the band, it was a little different for the audience.

"When people see a video with Danny [Kenyon, cello] and Colton, and we come to play with Eric [Mehlsou, cello] and Eliza, some people can't accept that it's not the people from the video playing onstage for them," says Hilts.

"That's really tough, and we'll get messages all the time from people who can't square what they've seen with what we're bringing. I mean, we send the show poster out with the lineup we're bringing, but some folks want the video they've seen, I guess."

Bringing in a new member on short notice, as they did with Doyle when Crawford left, presented a bit of a challenge.

"Eliza called us up and said, 'I hear you're



looking for a banjo player’,” says Hilts. “But she was scheduled to do her own tour, with three days between the end of that and the beginning of our Western Canadian tour, so she had to learn a lot of music in a few days. We had to cut our show down to about 18 songs, but just learning that much in a few days was excellent; she really saved us there.”

With two full-lengths and an EP behind them now, Hilts says the band is working on new material, and expect to grow as a band further through more recordings.

“When we made the first EP, we’d never recorded any music. It was our first time in a studio and we were pretty raw. And over the next couple records, we’ve developed to different degrees, and we’re always trying to expand on that. The new songs we’re writing, we’re noticing ourselves growing and broadening the sound, just on our own, so I think the audiences will notice it, too.”

The Dead South have long maintained a visual component to their show and marketing, which helps the band stand out from the regular crop of stand-and-pick-and-strum bluegrass, folkers. Their Depression-era/Old West style of dress matches up with their sound, and they’ve continuously added some slightly vaudevillian, mostly low-key choreography to their perfor-



mances, in addition to popping the tops off beer cans in unison.

“That was all just a growth of what we were doing. We’d play and someone would have an idea to throw in a little dance move here and there,” says Hilts. “It kept it interesting for us and made things visually appealing for the audience. We drink beers pretty regularly, so we thought we’d implement them into a song, maybe add some percussion to the mix,” Hilts says with a chuckle.

With all of the great music coming out of Saskatchewan these days, Hilts feels the band has some responsibility to share that with the

people they meet and play for on the road.

“It’s not like we feel like we have to keep up with anyone, we go at our own pace, like we’ve always done. We like to grind and play as many shows as we can. And with so much great music going on in, and coming from, Saskatchewan, it makes us want to show the world as much as we can. So if we get to bring some of our pals on the road with us from Saskatchewan, or share a video or song on our social media, that’s great. And it lets us show how great the music being made in Saskatchewan really is.”







## Jeffrey Martin

**His folk-meets-country-noir bristles with social commentary and reflects on the Beat Generation.**

**By Pat Langston**

“I’m not a bad man; I’m a poor man.”

So states the guy at the end of *Poor Man*, Jeffrey Martin’s song about labouring 10 hours a day and still having to count every dime. The track opens Martin’s latest album, *One Go Around*.

The line about being poor is simple—only one word has more than three letters—but it’s also evocative, speaking to a culture where poverty is often viewed as a character flaw.

Even Martin, who was raised by his pastor

father to view everyone as equal, says, “If I’m honest with myself, some part of me assumes there’s something wrong morally with someone if I see them (living on) the street. If you have a car and house, then you did something right. That’s not true. You could live your life as an asshole and still have money.”

In a sign of our times, the Oregon-based artist feels no need to illustrate the latter point by naming names.

His third full-length album, which straddles folk and noir-ish country, brims with writing that speaks volumes in a few pared-down phrases, such as that one about the struggling blue-collar guy. “*Halfway homes are only halfway home*,” Martin sings in *October Dark*, zeroing in on the loneliness of a woman who’s been in and out of prison. In *Sad Blue Eyes*, we learn that “*Everything’s a circle in this town*,” a succinct encapsulation of the desperation that

can entrap small centres.

“A lot of the music I hear has way more words than need to be there,” says Martin. “It’s better if you can leave the listener to fill in the details from their imagination. I love it when songwriters respect listeners enough to trust them to figure it out.”

His engagement with the language of songs—with what’s explicit and what’s not—comes naturally. He grew up on songwriters who were storytellers, he says. His father created playlists of storytelling musicians for family road trips, and a love of that kind of music became ingrained in the young Martin. Guitar playing was another matter.

“I never wanted to be a guitarist,” he says. “I just wanted to know enough to cover John Prine songs—which isn’t very much.”

To this day, his guitar playing is unadorned. Rather than being in the spotlight, it’s really



just intended to help him find the best way to tell the story, he says.

Martin's enthralment with telling the story was honed when he completed a writing degree and went on to become a high school English teacher, a career he relished for about four years, including a stint in Alaska, before leaving in 2016 to pursue music full-time.

"I loved every second of teaching," says the 33-year-old musician. "It was humbling, the way a 15-year-old kid could pull something out of a book I'd never even thought of."

The classroom and its very real, sometimes humbling, human dynamics remain instructive. "Music can be unhealthy in a lot of ways. It's a weird job to live in your head and write songs that come from that place and then sing them at night and everyone claps every three minutes."

People didn't applaud him in the classroom too often, but Martin—who by 2016 already had a couple of full-length albums to his credit—still struggled with leaving the profession when he finally accepted that he couldn't be both a dedicated teacher and a dedicated musician.

Besides, while a steady paycheck and pension benefits were enticing, Martin says he's just not built for waking up at 5:30 a.m. and clocking out of work at 3 p.m., year in, year

out. When he added it all up, throwing in the teaching towel was his only option.

"When I did it, it just felt so good," he says. "But I'll keep my teaching licence current."

Some of the parents and teachers from his educational career show up, disguised or in bits and pieces, in the songs he writes. William S. Burroughs is not one of those parents or teachers, however.

The pace-setting Beat Generation writer is the centrepiece of *Billy Burroughs* on the new album. Martin takes as his jumping-off point the infamous 1951 incident in which Burroughs accidentally killed his wife, Joan Vollmer, when, during a party, he tried to shoot a highball glass off her head but missed.

In the song, Martin wonders whether Burroughs knew immediately or only later, "That he would never come back again / Not from this." An intractable past that forever influences the present and the future crops up elsewhere on the album, including in *Sad Blue Eyes*. That awareness of an immutable past has become a defining part of his own life, says Martin.

"I lived my 20s with the notion that you can come back from almost anything. Since I've been in my 30s, I'm encountering evidence that people don't come back from some things."

Little wonder he sings, toward the end of *Billy Burroughs*—a song that moves with a sense of sad inevitability—"All Jack's horses and Ginsberg's men / Couldn't put him back together again."

These days, there's also a sense of brokenness about Martin's own homeland, one of which he's acutely aware. Rimmed round as it is by the lies of a reality show president, that brokenness translates into a demand for performers to be authentic in their shows, says Martin.

He says he sees audiences burdened by things they feel are out of their control, and when a performer can galvanize a room to say, 'Let's get behind this,' even just for the length of a performance, "It's very powerful."

Martin's music is often thought of as bleak or world weary. He prefers to think of music not in terms of happy/sad but honest/dishonest, with songs such as *Poor Man* falling into the honest camp. Besides, he says, there are moments of hope in the new album, *Thrift Store Dress*—a song about love and self-knowledge—being a prime example.

At the same time, he says, "I get emails from people saying they want me to play at their wedding. I'm so shocked. I want to say, 'Have you listened to my music?'"

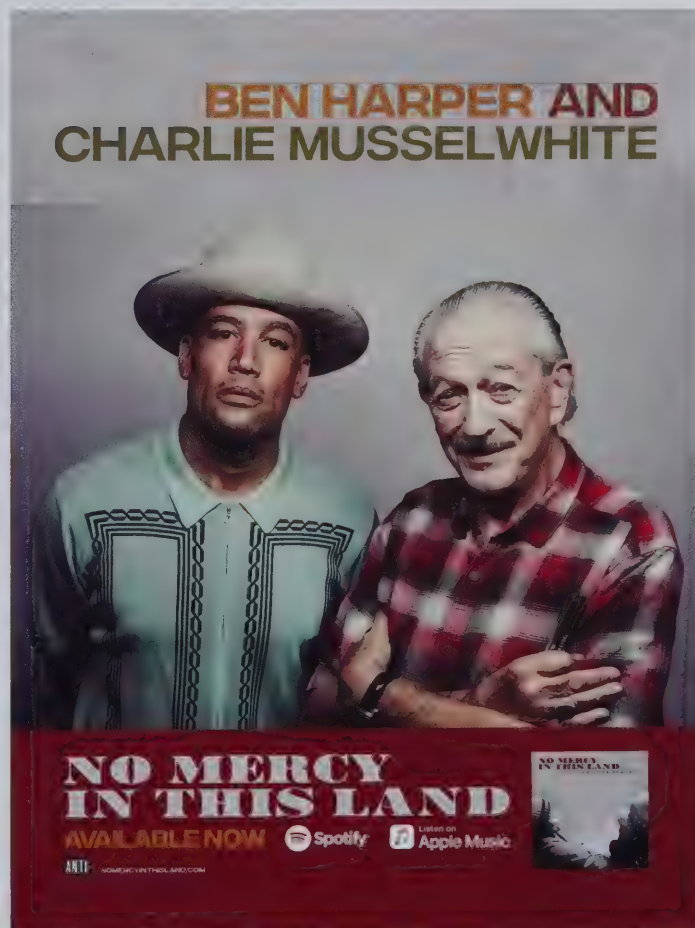


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## Don Ross

**A powerful and commanding guitarist, his complex, acoustic music straddles funk to folk.**

**By M.D. Dunn**

**I**t's a nightmare scenario. In late 2017, just nine days before embarking on a month-long tour of Eastern Asia, guitarist Don Ross severed the tip of his index finger while making salsa. For many musicians, an injury to the fretting hand would mean cancelled dates and months of rest.

"I felt a bit as if I had been hit by lightning. My immediate thoughts were that I may never play guitar again," says Ross, "Even before I had the wherewithal to try to staunch the bleeding!"

Ross did what one is supposed to do: he gathered his severed fingertip in a jar, called a taxi, and hightailed it to the hospital. Although the bit of finger he'd saved couldn't be reattached, the doctor assured him the injury would heal over time. With the first show in the South Korean leg of the tour approaching, Ross had adjustments to make. Some frantic research uncovered a finger plaster that could have been designed for injured guitar virtuosos. The bandage, which fit like an artificial callus over the end the finger, enabled limited use.

"The first couple of shows I did, I relied a lot more on my vocal material, keeping the guitar parts relatively sparse," he says. "But, I did manage to play some of my more challenging material even at that first concert after the injury. By the third concert, I had healed enough and was adept enough at dressing the wound that I was really able to play at about 90 per

cent of my usual ability."

By mid-December, as the tour concluded in China, Ross could play all but a couple of pieces in his regular repertoire. By year's end, the wound had almost completely healed.

"I may just have to deal with some lingering nerve sensitivity for a while, which may mean applying Superglue to the missing callus to reduce that sensitivity for playing. That's a tip that many other people have given me. Pardon the pun."

Considering his kinetic style and the number of engagements he's played over the decades, Ross has been relatively free of injury. Tendinitis has been an issue, but a manageable one.

"With tendinitis," he says, "the ultimate irony is that the only time you're not in pain is when you're performing the action that gave you tendinitis! So, when my arms have hurt, one way to make the pain go away was to play



more! That is definitely not what the doctor would order. When people ask my advice on how to avoid playing-based injuries, my usual response is simply not to play too much.

“Problems like tendinitis and more serious things like carpal tunnel syndrome and focal dystonia are the direct results of too much repetitive motion. Being an obsessive can have very deleterious results. Don’t overdo it.”

Don Ross has toured for three decades. His first official album, 1989’s *Bearing Straight* (Duke Street Records), brought him wide acclaim. But the fingerstyle innovator was already well-known in guitar circles from his award-winning performances and appearances on CBC television. So respected was the 29-year-old guitarist that Michael Hedges wrote the liner notes for that first Duke Street album. Since then, Ross has released 19 solo albums, with the most recent, the gorgeous *A Million Brazilian Civilians* (Candy Rat Records) appearing in 2017.

Listening to Don Ross’s music is the aural equivalent of riding an avalanche. There is a power and command in his playing that can seem otherworldly at times. Multiple lines of melody, complex harmonies, harmonic punctuation, and a nuanced percussive attack come together in mysterious and unexpected ways.

Genres blend in Ross’s music, making it a genre of its own. It’s Don Ross music, and you know it when you hear it. His parents’ passion for classical music was an early influence. His father studied opera at École de Musique Vincent D’Indy in Montreal, and his mother introduced young Don to the music of flamenco guitarist Carlos Montoya and classical guitarist Narcisco Yepes.

These genres are still heard in Ross’s syncretic sound. Other influences—Bruce Cockburn, British fingerstyle legend John Renbourn, jazz, African rhythms, and funk—inform his playing. It was trying to “play all the parts” of Parliament funk records that helped the young guitarist develop his chops. Music unrestricted by genre is what he is after; the guitar is just the vehicle.

“I have always felt that I am playing music on the guitar, as opposed to just playing guitar music. The guitar is a wonderful, gorgeous, portable instrument, capable of playing both melodically and harmonically, but I’m not a guitar head. I also didn’t grow up listening to solo guitar music.”

Bruce Cockburn provided the young Ross with a model of what could be done with an acoustic guitar. “Bruce’s music was really my first exposure to someone doing something modern on the guitar that made it viable as a solo instrument,” Ross says of his first guitar

hero.

Ross began teaching at the age of 12, just four years after first picking up the acoustic guitar. The experience with that first student—a nine-year-old who, after two years of instruction, could play Bruce Cockburn’s *Foxglove* along with other challenging pieces—revealed a talent for teaching in young Ross. He continues to teach, although he has struggled with the role over the years.

“I used to consider teaching something of a necessary evil, or even a compulsory bit of community service that professional musicians are compelled to offer simply by virtue of demand,” he says. “I often found myself wanting to fall asleep just before my student showed up, which I think was a reaction to the dread I felt about putting in time to teach people. I just wanted to play live, and I often felt teaching just got in the way.

“But, when I started having children, teaching sure made staying home much more feasible financially. It was nice to make the family’s grocery money in my home studio. I think at that point I kind of reconciled myself to the fact that I was actually a very good teacher. It explained why some of my students stayed with me for years. Teaching has, more and more, become an important part of my income stream. As a musician, you need as many of those as you can possibly find!”

This year, Don Ross will serve as artist-in-residence at Carleton University in Ottawa, where he will teach music theory for guitarists and give private lessons, lectures,

master classes, and performances.

“I’m going to split my time between Ottawa, my home in Halifax, and the road. It would be nice if somebody would hurry up and perfect the home cloning kit!”

While the spare parts may have come in handy after the salsa incident of 2017, multiple copies of this unique player could very well cause catastrophic stress to the fabric of the universe. Genetic cloning aside, Ross does not encourage prolonged emulation of guitar heroes.

Rather, he advises guitar players “to listen to all kinds of music played on all kinds of instruments. The mistake a lot of new players make, especially now with so much online access, is emulating or imitating to the point where they are not developing any sense of self on the instrument. After having played an instrument for a couple of years, it’s nice if something of the personality of the player starts to come through rather than simply being a human tape recorder.

“With the sheer volume of people who play the guitar, the emergence of truly unique musical personalities is still a relatively rare thing. When I do hear promising talent emerge from someone’s playing, one of the first things I tell them is to stop listening to guitarists. I encourage them to start trying to play like a pianist or like an orchestra or like a horn section. It helps to break one out of the mould of sounding like everyone else who has ever played the instrument!”

[www.donrossonline.com](http://www.donrossonline.com)







Photo: Courtesy John Einarson

## 10 Great Lost Canadian Folk Venues

**G**reenwich Village—ground zero for the urban folk revival—nurtured numerous iconic singers and musicians. Throughout the 1950s and into the mid-'60s, its Washington Square and surrounding clubs and coffee houses produced an artistic folk ferment that spread around the world. Dave Van Ronk, Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, Judy Collins, Richie Havens, Tom Paxton...all polished their craft in Village venues with such colourful names as Café Wha?, Kettle of Fish, and The Bitter End.

As the revival took hold in Canada, folk venues sprang up like spring flowers. Some of them even stuck around. Performances in our coffee houses, church basements, clubs, restaurants, often holes in the wall, were largely booked by enthusiastic amateurs, and with a minimum of promotion. Their sound systems were often primitive, if they existed at all, but these numerous venues also produced internationally acclaimed songwriters the likes of Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Bruce Cockburn...

Here we highlight 10 of those lost rooms, their history largely told by those who were there. They are listed in order of origin.

—Roddy Campbell

### The Fourth Dimension Winnipeg, MB: 1959-65

By John Einarson

**T**he Fourth Dimension coffee house, located at 2000 Pembina Highway at University Crescent in south Winnipeg, opened in 1959 in the former Jack's Place dinner and dance club.

Initially popular during the big-band jazz era, it was one of a chain of three other clubs owned by Gene Ciuka in Fort William, Winnipeg, and Regina. The once all-white club beside the Pembina Drive-in Theatre was then repainted black, given a dark bohemian interior (black walls lined with a snow fence and dim lighting), and recast as the 4D.

Besides booking travelling folk artists such as Casey Anderson, Len Chandler, Tim Rose, The Dirty Shames, Gale Garnett (*We'll Sing in the Sunshine*), and Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee (Harry Belafonte, in town at the Rancho Don Carlos, snuck in through the back door to watch Terry & McGhee), the venue often featured local performers.

Sunday night hootenannies were a popular attraction for aspiring folksingers and musicians and went on until all hours of the morning. Guitar genius Lenny Breau often dropped in for late-night impromptu performances.

The stage was small and elevated, the audience close. With seating for approximately 100 people, the 4D offered an intimacy between

## Joni Mitchell At Coffee House

Folksinger Joni Mitchell will be appearing at Le Hibou coffee house March 12-24.

Joni has written more than 40 songs in the past year and recently has been working on a record to be released shortly on Frank Sinatra's Reprise label. She composed and sings the title tune for the television show *The Way It Is*.

performer and audience.

In 1963, the venue changed owners and Len Udow then hosted the Sunday hootenanny. These often included Fred Penner, Jim Donahue, a flamenco guitarist everyone remembers only as T.K., Daisy DeBolt, animator Richard Condie, members of the Down-To-Earthenware Jug Band, and Three Blind Mice (the three Kozub siblings), and Neil Young. He would meet Joan Anderson, better now known as Joni Mitchell, when she performed at the 4D.

Stephen Stills's New York-based folk quintet, The Company, appeared for a weeklong stand at the 4D in April 1965. He and Young met up the week before at the Fort William 4D.

By 1966, rock'n'roll had overtaken folk music in popularity and the 4D closed its doors that spring.

**Memorable Gigs:** Neil Young, Stephen Stills.

### Le Hibou Ottawa, ON: 1960-75

By Arthur McGregor

**F**ounded in 1960, Le Hibou initially served University of Ottawa students, offering coffee, poetry readings, and chess. Eventually located on Sussex Drive in the Byward Market, the programming was diverse and bilingual: poetry readings by Leonard Cohen, Irving Layton, Gwendolyn McEwen, and Bill Hawkins; theatre presentations such as *Crawling Arnold* by Jules Pfeiffer, and *Bousille et les justes* by Gratien Gelinas; modern dance, French and English cinema, and the musicians of the era—Gilles Vigneault, and Richard & Marie-Claire Séguin, Ian & Sylvia, The Travellers, Joni Mitchell, Jimi Hendrix, Neil Young, MRQ, James Cotton, and hundreds of others all were presented on the eclectic Le Hibou stage.

Local musicians such as Sneezy Waters,





An assortment of Perth County Conspirators and friends. From L to R, David Woodhead, Maureen Jarvis, Pierrepot, Cedric Smith, and Terry Jones outside the Black Swan.

Photo: Courtesy of David Woodhead



Geoff Panting of Rawlins Cross at Bridgett's Club 1991

Photo by: Shane Kelly

## Bridgett's Club

St John's, NL: 1964-94

By Jean Hewson

Paul Kelly opened Bridgett's Club on Cookstown Road, St. John's, NL, in 1964. In those days, taverns sold beer, and catered to an all-male clientele. Men would meet for a drink after a hard day's work, or drop in after supper for a yarn and a game of pool with their friends.

Kelly's father-in-law was in Joseph R. Smallwood's cabinet—a connection that resulted in the acquisition of a liquor licence, enabling him to serve hard liquor, a commodity generally found only in swanky hotel bars. The little tavern prospered.

Eight years later, Kelly told his wife, Janet, that he needed some time off, and she agreed to become the manager. She distributed drink tickets to her female friends, inviting them to the bar and causing quite a stir amongst the customers.

Her brother, Kearney McGrath, started dropping in and bringing his friends. Kearney was a folk musician, and the locals soon found themselves sharing their favourite watering hole with women, fiddlers, singers, and other Bohemian interlopers.

Bridgett's became the public home of traditional music in St. John's from 1972 to 1977, presenting performances by many of the best-known proponents of the Newfoundland folk revival, including Emile Benoit, Ron Hynes, Rufus Guinchard, and Anita Best.

In 1977, Janet left Bridgett's to open a fine food store named Auntie Crae's. As a result, the bar's music scene experienced some ups and downs.

Enter the next generation: in the mid-1980s, Kelly's son, Shane, started to work at the bar. Keenly interested in a wide variety of genres, Shane presented acts ranging from blues and

kitchen staff then make their way home to their shared farmhouses through the sheets of farmland fog.

Bridging the civil rights era with the back-to-the-land, the Swan was founded in 1961 by the quiet Harry Finlay and featured Stratford's first espresso machine and a mix of entertainment, including Jackie Washington, Cedric Smith, David Wiffen, and bluesman Al Cromwell.

Its world grew to include Mennonite apple cider distribution, the Grassmaster Toy Company, a lighting rig homebrewed from tomato juice cans, and Rumour Records, one of Canada's first truly independent labels.

In 1969, the pairing of Smith with Richard Keelan led to the formation of the Perth County Conspiracy (does not exist)—yes, that's the full name of the group, in the iconoclastic spirit of the Chicago Seven and *Steal This Book*. The music was fused with poetry and theatre, with the Swan acting as crucible and testing ground with its theatre-seasoned audience perfectly willing to be carried off to realms of political satire and musical fantasy.

Later years brought newcomers such as David Essig, The Good Brothers, Brent Titcomb, and Beverley Glenn-Copeland to the stage. The doors closed after the 1975 summer season and all those colourful wooden chairs had to find new homes.

Every August for the past 27 years, there has been a Black Swan Revival event in Stratford at the startlingly Swan-like Knox Church. There's a random assortment of former Conspirators and new talent, and all proceeds go to at-risk youth in the area through Shelterlink.

**Memorable Gigs:** John Lee Hooker, Perth County Conspiracy.

David Wiffen, Bruce Cockburn, and Bob Stark found their musical legs at Le Hibou. An open stage, then called a hootenanny, was a popular and regular event.

Weather Report was an opportune hiring in the late history of the club with Sonny Terry & Brownie McGee and James Cotton popular with all of their shows. Cockburn, Valdy, and Ian Tamblyn were the Canadian favourites.

With 15-foot ceilings, brick walls, enough space for a good stage and 100 folks in café settings, 150 in concert setting, excellent sight lines, an upstairs green room, the federal government, subsidized the rent to encourage the National Capital's arts scene and to popularize the Byward Market area.

Increasing rents and competing venues forced Pierre Paul Lafreniere, the last owner of Le Hibou, to close the doors in 1975. Journalist Ken Rockburn wrote an excellent history of Le Hibou, *We Are As The Times Are – The Story of Café Le Hibou* (2015) – a vital part of Canada's folk history.

(Added info from Pierre Paul Lafreniere, Denis Faulkner, and Ken Rockburn.)

**Memorable Gigs:** Fraser & DeBolt, Joni Mitchell

## The Black Swan

Stratford, ON: 1961-75

By David Woodhead

Climb the stairs off Stratford's Market Square after a Festival Theatre show and you learn admission is \$2.50 or \$3.50, your choice. You've entered the anarchic and irreverent world of the Black Swan coffee house, where the first set of music starts after 11 p.m. and goes until the wee hours. Musicians and





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Fiddler's Green: Jim Strickland and Grit Laskin on the porch

Photo: Courtesy of Grit Laskin

traditional to singer/songwriters and avant-garde rock bands. At its peak, Bridgett's presented live music four to five nights a week, including the Wednesday night folk club—an event that continues to this day at another legendary St. John's venue, the Ship Pub.

When Bridgett's closed its doors on Feb. 19, 1994, it was a sad occasion for the many musicians who found a home and a supportive audience within its walls. But it left behind a legacy of excellence in local programming, and helped set the bar for future live-music venues within the city.

**Memorable Gigs:** Rufus Guinchard, Ron Hynes.

## Riverboat

Toronto, ON: 1964-78

By Eric Alper

The most famous of all Yorkville's clubs, the joyous Riverboat coffee house was notable as a showcase for the biggest names in folk and blues music during the 1960s and '70s.

It's not an understatement to say Toronto, or Canada, or even the worldwide folk scene, wouldn't be the same without this 120-capacity club, located at 134 Yorkville Avenue in the Yorkville neighbourhood.

It opened in October 1964 and closed on June 25, 1978, and during those 14 years, looking back, it's astounding the sheer talent of artists who performed there who touched, even changed, our lives in a very personal way: Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Ian & Sylvia, Gordon Lightfoot, Bruce Cockburn, Murray McLauchlan...

It was also a frequent stop on the touring

circuit for many American artists, such as John Lee Hooker, James Taylor, Tim Hardin, Simon & Garfunkel, and Phil Ochs.

According to legend, several songs that would become popular, including Mitchell's *Clouds* and Phil Ochs's *Changes*, were composed in the club's upstairs backroom. Neil Young would later immortalize The Riverboat in his song *Ambulance Blues* and release *Live at The Riverboat* in 1969, getting an official release 30 years later and reviving hundreds of memories in the process.

Playing owner Bernie Fiedler's prestigious coffee house was an indication that you'd hit the hard-bitten big time. When you think about it, I'm not sure if the artists made the club, or the club made the artists. Maybe a bit of both.

Folk is known for straddling those lines of history, authenticity, tradition, and boundaries. And yet, the top names booked broke those borders with each album, as Fiedler did with each passing year of the club's existence.

The Riverboat represented remaining true to your art, your scene, your culture, your audience. Against all odds, before Canadian content rules were in existence, this club mattered.

**Memorable Gigs:** Gordon Lightfoot, Simon & Garfunkel

## Fiddler's Green

Toronto, ON: 1970-90

By Grit Laskin

Fiddler's Green was a folk club very much in the British tradition, started by two expat Scots in 1970—Tam Kearney and Jim Strickland.

It occupied a partially condemned house (the upper two floors were closed off) that belonged

to the YMCA, and could squeeze in perhaps 125 people. It ran for almost 20 years in that location, and when the house was finally slated for demolition it moved to Toronto's Tranzac Club (Toronto Australia New Zealand Association) and ran there for a few more years. (To date, there is frequent music of all kinds at the Tranzac building, and it all began with Fiddler's Green.)

One of the wonderful things about this club, which ran concerts two nights a week—Tuesdays and Fridays—was its centrality to the folk community. During the day and on dark evenings, the house was used by: the Irish Traditional Music Society for their tune sessions, the bluegrass folks jammed there, the shape note choir practiced there, the Morris dancers met there, and there were even knitting and weaving classes, taught by Tam's wife, Margot.

In those years, everyone from Bruce Cockburn to the High Level Ranters or the astonishing Frankie Armstrong (both from England), to the Georgia Sea Island Singers could all be heard on the Fiddler's Green stage. Bram Morrison and Raffi, who each became well-known children's entertainers, were there at the club, performing their adult repertoire. Stan Rogers was often on that stage, and the legendary Flatt & Scruggs played together there as a duo for the first time in many years.

A wonderful policy of the club was that there were three guest slots each night. There was no vetting—the first three people to phone and book it got the spots. That's how I first experienced the club as a 17-year-old new to Toronto—I did a guest set. Tam liked what he heard and gave me a full night. Soon I became part of the loose house band and would help Tam warm up the audience each night.





M.C. Mike Regenstreif  
at The Golem circa 1975

Photo: Courtesy of Mike Regenstreif

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To this day, 47 years later, I'm still in that 'loose' band, The Friends Of Fiddler's Green, still performing. Best of all, I met my future wife, Judith, there, who was a regular patron and volunteer.

**Memorable Gigs:** Flatt & Scruggs, Frankie Armstrong.

## The Golem

**Montreal, QC: 1973-91**

**By Mike Regenstreif**

There's a photo from 1953 of McGill student Leonard Cohen on guitar playing with an accordionist at McGill University's Hillel House (Hillel is the Jewish student society). Twenty years later, Saul Markowicz opened a folk club, the Golem Coffee House, in Hillel's beautiful front room, with its barnwood panelled walls, which could hold up to 100 people.

A year later, Saul was ready to pack it in and offered me the Golem. I took it and ran with it.

My vision was to feature the best of the Montreal folk scene and great touring artists in a focused listening environment.

My first weekend at the Golem featured Bruce Murdoch, one of my favourite Montreal singer/songwriters. Others to play the Golem that summer included Sneezy Waters, Kate and Anna McGarrigle with Roma Baran, and Jesse Winchester, who celebrated the release of his third LP at the Golem with concerts that were covered by *Rolling Stone*.

I ran the Golem through the summer of 1976 when Marc Nerenberg took over for a year before Hillel decided to close it. I reopened the Golem in the Hillel House in 1981 and ran it through 1987. A committee including Dave

Clarke, Ellen Shizgal, and Helen Fortin kept the Golem going until 1991 when it closed permanently.

I've memories of so many great nights at the Golem and of the many great artists who played there: an unknown Stan Rogers drew about 20 people over three nights the first time he played there on the coldest weekend of the winter of 1975-76, and was selling out two shows a night before he died; Tom Paxton; Odetta; Murray McLauchlan; Nanci Griffith; Utah Phillips; Rosalie Sorrels; Kate Wolf; Eric Andersen; Loudon Wainwright III; Penny Lang; Roger McGuinn; Ramblin' Jack Elliott; Josh White Jr.; Humphrey and the Dumptrucks...more than 1,000 nights of music that people still tell me they remember well (and continue to miss).

**Memorable Gigs:** Odetta, Kate & Anna McGarrigle

## The Hovel

**Edmonton, AB: 1973-77**

**By Kenneth Brown**

The Hovel was founded in Edmonton in 1973 in a small venue near the CNR rail line. It was the initiative of The Society for the Preservation of an Artistic Reality in a Social Environment (S.P.A.R.S.E.), founded by Edmonton underground activists led by Andy Laskiwsky.

The Hovel moved to the corner of Jasper Avenue and 109th Street into the old Commercial Printers space in August 1975. This brick-walled, 5,000-square-foot space proved to be an ideal venue, acoustically and aesthetically, and also in terms of its location, with a rear loading dock looking out over (this time) the

CP rail line. The dock was sometimes crowded with people taking fresh air, or indulging in a puff of weed.

From the very first concert, featuring Roy Forbes (then known as Bim), the venue was a hit with Edmonton music lovers. On a typical week, the club opened Wednesday night to open stage performers. On Thursday, the only licensed night of the week, the joint jumped to blues and rock music. Local bands such as Pontiac, Tacoy Ryde, and Hot Cottage as well as touring acts loved to play Thursdays at The Hovel.

Friday to Sunday, The Hovel was the place to be to listen to alternative music. Within a year, the venue had become one of the must-stop venues on the North American folk, blues, and jazz circuits.

Great Canadian songwriters such as Bruce Cockburn, Joe Hall, Brent Titcomb, and Paul Hann found a place where the audience wanted to listen. International names included Jesse Winchester, Leon Redbone, The Dillards, and Ramblin' Jack Elliott.

The venue was a second home to the blues. Thanks to Holger Petersen's show, Natch'l Blues, on CKUA, Edmonton had a solid foundation of blues lovers. Louisiana Red played a memorable weekend. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee packed the house, as did Roosevelt Sykes and Peg-Leg Sam.

Over the four short years of its existence, The Hovel literally changed the face of Alberta music. When the building was bought by commercial interests and torn down for a new office tower in 1977, a huge hole opened up in Edmonton's musical scene.

**Memorable Gigs:** Leon Redbone, Louisiana Red



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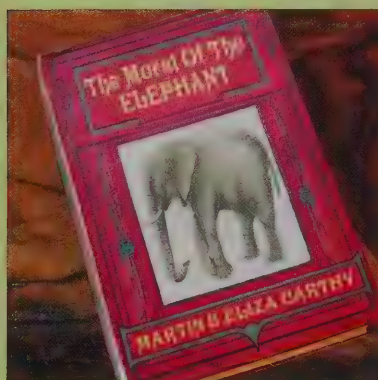
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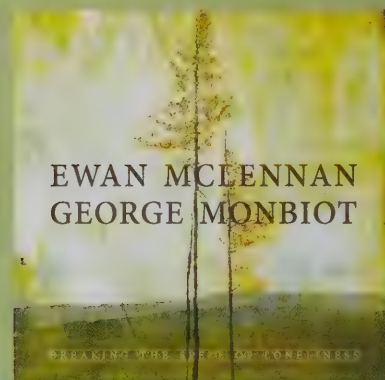
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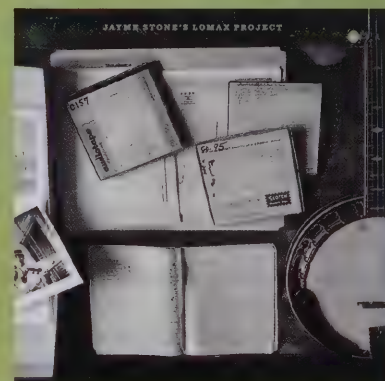
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## Smales Pace

London, ON: 1970-75

By Doug McArthur

“Smales Pace” was a convoluted pun based on the name Smale—referencing the founders of the eponymous club, John, Bob, and Jim.

The Smales Pace club and restaurant were located in downtown London, ON,—midway between Detroit and Toronto—just far enough away from both to support its own music-sphere. Big university town, so lots of warm bodies to support it.

The building was an old Bell Telephone garage but the interior was eccentric enough and there was a space out front for office workers to lunch and a roof and a back stoop that we could sit up on and watch the universe go by.

Wonderful soups, homemade bread and coffee, beautiful waitresses, the place became a second home for Stan Rogers, David Bradstreet, Willie P. Bennett (who actually slept there most nights), Lazarus (who preferred Smales’ folk scene to Woodstock, NY).

Probably seated a hundred—always full, although the only time I saw it jam up was when Tom Rush booked himself in for two weeks to practise a new band and the club had to switch to two shows a night to accommodate the crowds. At his last sold-out show, he said, “I understand this is usually a pretty nice club.”

Bruce Cockburn, Murray McLauchlan, Colleen Peterson, David Wiffen, Ian Tamblyn, Biff Rose, David Essig, and so many others played amazing shows there. Lightfoot dropped

in after performing a big concert at Western University.

Then waitress Laura Smith learned to play piano on the old upright in the corner before launching her successful career.

Stan Rogers and his dad built the stage there—the original stage was too small for Stan’s needs. Stan had plans for a band. They built the lovely bay window out front as well.

Smales Pace ran from 1970-75 but it sprang back to life in a different location as Change of Pace, which continued much of the musical policies and performers under the careful stewardship of Anne and Carl Grindstaff.

**Memorable Gigs:** Tom Rush, David Essig.

## South Side Folk Club

Edmonton, AB: 1975-94

By Jim MacLachlan

Formed in 1975 by Jeanette MacLachlan and three friends with a common interest in the British folk tradition, the South Side Folk Club ran for 19 years.

The Edmonton folk scene of the ’70s was comprised of the Edmonton Folk Club and The Hovel. Both venues featured local talent and North American acts. The SSFC was formed as an alternative folk venue by breaking from the coffee house model and following the British/Irish tradition where folk clubs are run in pubs.

The club initially operated from the U of A Grad House before moving to the Orange Hall. Although neither venue was a pub, the club obtained a liquor permit so beer, wine, meat pies,

and folk music were all on the menu.

The booking policy was to secure the best folk talent available by offering a good venue, an honest fee, food, and accommodation.

Early Orange Hall concerts featured acts such as Bob Carpenter, Big Dave McLean, Figgy Duff, and Stan Rogers, all supported by local musicians.

With the success of the early concerts, the club’s reputation spread among artists and agents and resulted in requests for bookings from Canada, the U.S., and the U.K.

A mutually beneficial relationship with the Calgary folk clubs, the Lethbridge folk club, and contacts in Medicine Hat and Saskatchewan allowed the SSFC to offer international artists a financial guarantee for a five to eight-date Western Canadian tour.

This resulted in many U.K. and Irish acts taking up the offer, giving them an alternate to touring the U.K. and Europe. In reflection, memorable concerts were Robin Williamson and Hamish Imlach, Martin Simpson and June Tabor, Dougie MacLean, Eric Bogle, The Easy Club, Ossian, Roy Bailey and Leon Rosselson, and Jake Thackery.

Success in the Orange Hall and revenues from tours enabled the club to bring in international folk acts such as The Chieftains, The Fureys, and comedian Billy Connolly.

The 1970s and 1980s was a special time for the Alberta folk music scene and the SSFC. Looking back, it truly was a pleasure to be able to introduce these artists to Western Canada.

**Memorable Gigs:** Martin Simpson & June Tabor, Hamish Imlach.



Stan Rogers set the stage at Smales Pace

Photo: Courtesy of Grit Laskin



Dougie MacLean at the South Side Folk Club

Photo: Courtesy of Jim MacLachlan



# SITTING ON TOP OF THE WORLD



**Chris Smither** dropped out of academia for a life as an itinerant musician. Along the way, he wrote masterful songs but plunged into the depths of despair. It took him a dozen years to regain his creative momentum and he has never looked back. Words By **Roddy Campbell**.



***“It all comes down to the sound,  
And when you can’t find a key,  
Spin it around on the common ground,  
'Til it sounds like me.”***

**– *Down To The Sound*, Chris Smither**

**W**ords to live by, insists Chris Smither. These lyrics appear on his fab’ new double disc, *Call Me Lucky*. Songwriting, he will tell you, he still finds elusive despite a catalogue that spans more than 50 years and features numerous intimate discs of considerable taste and indomitable originality. Such towering talents as Emmylou Harris, Bonnie Raitt, Diana Krall, Loudon Wainwright, Dave Alvin, Mary Gauthier...have all recorded Smither’s songs.

**A**nd now *Call Me Lucky* offers his first original material since 2012’s *Hundred Dollar Valentine*. And it’s one for the books, too, when you consider he covers the songs he wrote and recorded on side A on side B. Still with me? Well, it all started with Chuck Berry’s birthday.

“Goody—David Goodrich, my producer—and I were talking about Chuck Berry because he had just turned 90 and was releasing a new record,” says a warm, welcoming Smither. “And we were thinking, ‘What in the hell is Chuck Berry going to sound like at 90? Is he more laid back? Has he got resigned about anything?’ The more we kept talking about him...

“Goody said, ‘Play *Maybellene* in a minor key.’ I don’t think Chuck Berry ever played in a minor key in his life. So I started working it out, an arrangement in A-minor, and the whole thrust of the song totally changed. The more we got into it...finally Goody said, ‘We’ve got to record this; this is great.’ And then, of course, Chuck Berry died a few

weeks after this conversation, and that just cemented it.

“But that started a whole conversation about covers. And that resulted in the second disc of this record, which is all covers of ourselves, done entirely differently—we totally re-imagined the songs that are on the first disc. There’s a whole B-side. It starts out with a guitar duet cover of The Beatles’ *She Said, She Said*.

“What happened was, we were recording down in Texas. I’m an old man now so I go to bed around 10:00, 11:00 o’clock. But these guys would stay up until three or four in the morning playing around with the arrangements of the songs that we just recorded, these new songs. And they would come up with all this stuff. I would show up in the morning and they would say, ‘Hey, can you sing to this? Listen to this. This is *Everything On Top*. They would play and it was like a punk rock version of it. And I was there doing these vocals, and on that particular song I’m just screaming. And then *Nobody Home* is almost done as a dirge. On the A-side, it is almost like a funny song—there’s a lot of humour to it. On the B-side all that is gone. It’s tragic almost. It’s amazing.”

Unequivocally, Chris Smither has an uncanny knack for reinventing songs—stripping them to their essence before meticulously rebuilding, stanza by stanza, until they re-emerge singularly refreshed. Past history shows a particular predilection for the work of Bob Dylan. Indeed, classic Smither covers include *Desolation Row*, *Visions of Johanna*, *It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry*, but can freely flit between Mississippi John Hurt’s *Candy Man* and the Grateful Dead’s *Friend of the Devil*.

While *Call Me Lucky* offers the aforementioned *Maybellene* and *She Said, She Said*, it also includes a smoldering take on the Mississippi Sheiks’ evergreen *Sitting On Top Of The World*. Both *Maybellene* and *Sitting On Top Of The World* appear in different guises on previous records.

“There are songs that I just can’t get out of my head,” says Smither. “I can’t let them go until I figure out a way how to play them. It’s hard to explain, but they get under my skin and I have to get them out.

“*Sitting On Top Of The World* just seemed like a good idea. I love the arrangement, the slowness of it, the whole contradictory nature of it. He’s sitting on top of the world but obviously his heart is broken. It’s another change of point of view. Normally when you hear it, it’s very uptempo, very cheerful.”

And then there’s *Down To The Sound*, quoted above, and its kindred spirit, *By The Numbers*:

*One more time into the deep unknown / One more time into the soul /  
One more run to get this done / Then let it go.*

Two songs about writing songs, surely? What gives?

“*By The Numbers* is kind of mysterious. I haven’t totally formulated what that one means, but I kind of like your idea.

“*Down To The Sound*, that song’s all about how to write a song. It’s a heavy lift for me. It takes me quite a while to get moving. I have to lock myself into my music room and promise myself I won’t come out for several hours.

“Right in the middle of [writing for the new record] I had to call a radio station to do an interview I had arranged previously. So we’re in the middle of the interview and [the host] says, ‘Tell me, Chris, how do you write songs?’ I said, ‘That’s a really good question. In fact, if you have any good ideas I could use a few right about now.’

“I’ve been asked that question so many times. I sort of have an answer but it’s not very coherent or logical because the process isn’t coherent or logical. When the interview was over I sat back down to go over my work and I thought maybe I should write about that, how to write a song. And that’s basically how *Down To The Sound* came about.

“I do keep scraps of paper with little turns of phrases on them and word





Chris Smither



David (Goody) Goodrich and his diddley bow

combinations that I like. There's nothing schematic about them at all. Themes tend to develop as the song is being written. Sometimes a song is half written before I have any idea what it's about."

No such ambiguity surrounds the occupant of "*the white house down on Pennsylvania Avenue*," on *Nobody Home: I saw a clown with a comover tryin' to float a loan / Through the CIA while he tweeted on his phone....*

So, Chris, tell us what you really think of Donald Trump.

"I've been angry for a whole year now. One of the problems with Donald Trump, he puts you in a negative frame of mind. I like to accentuate the positive. If I were going to take down Donald Trump, I would paint an alternative that was more objective. You'd think that would be easy but it makes you so mad thinking about him that it's hard to get onto that.

"The sooner this is over the better. I don't know, maybe we are just getting what we deserve."

Less blunt, but political nonetheless, *Change Your Mind* addresses the ever-increasing polarization of American politics. Yet, it's a delightfully disarming Cajun/country two-step propelled by a fiddle, a diddley bow (a one-stringed, homemade instrument), a gorgeous chorus and ubiquitous feet-tapping. The ever-present feet-tapping, he says, is a habit of a lifetime—an inbuilt metronome.

"It's something that I've always done. I'd discovered about halfway through my career that if I couldn't hear my feet I couldn't play. I used to wonder why certain concerts didn't go very well and then I realized that every time that happened there was a carpeted stage. When I realized I had to hear my feet and feel them, I thought the audience should hear it, too, so I started mic'ing my feet for performances."

**T**he one other constant on any Chris Smither record of late is producer and multi-instrumentalist David (Goody) Goodrich. While they've known each other from the Cambridge/Boston folk scene of the mid-'60s, it took until *Train Home* (2003) before they began recording together. Smither had been working with Stephen Burton, whose credits then included the likes of T-Bone Burnett and Alejandro Escovedo, but after three records it was time to move on. Goody literally talked himself into the job.

"Goody called me up out of the blue. And he made a pitch for himself.

He said, 'I just wanted to call you and make sure that you understood that in my mind, I could produce you the way you're supposed to sound.'

"The smartest thing I ever did was get him to produce me. He understands what makes my stuff good. In some ways, he knows me better than I know myself. He can sit there and listen to new stuff that I have done and he has immediate ideas. And he directs me. If I get off course, sometimes you start a song and you keep working at it, he's got a memory, and he'll come to me sometimes and say, 'That's not what you were doing two weeks ago. What you had two weeks ago was better than that.' He can show me, 'You know, it had this.' He gets involved. It's almost like having another head."

**C**hris Smither was born in Miami in 1944, where his father worked in counter-intelligence while attached to the FBI. The family were then posted to Quito, Ecuador, but returned to San Antonio, TX, at the conclusion of the Second World War. Smither Sr. then turned to academia at Tulane University in New Orleans where he developed language labs. Smither Jr. was destined for academia, too, as an anthropologist, but he discovered his mom's ukulele at age nine. When his uncle Howard Smither—a professor of music at the University of North Carolina—taught Chris three chords, his destiny was set.

A Spanish guitar arrived for his 11th birthday, while attending public school in Paris, and although he learned folk songs by the likes of Burl Ives and The Weavers from his parents' record collection, and hung out in New Orleans clubs such as The Quorum and The Dream Palace to hear Delta bluesmen like Babe Stovall, Smither's road to Damascus conversion to acoustic blues truly began in Mexico City.

As a freshman at college, he spent a year there half-heartedly pursuing his studies. His roommate from Texas, Tom Whitten, listened to Smither play *House Of The Rising Sun*, then pulled out Lightnin' Hopkins's LP *Blues In My Bottle*.

"That was when I understood I had a lot to learn. In the first place, it took me about three cuts to realize there was only one guy playing. I knew nothing about finger-picked guitar. It just seemed absurd to me. But the overwhelming impression, when I found that it was one guy, was that you could play rock'n'roll by yourself. I was close to the truth. Rock'n'roll was an outgrowth of blues. Blues fans came from solo blues performers. It was the roots of rock'n'roll that I was listening to. I had no idea at the time. I was just listening to this guy. My friend was telling me he's a blues guy and I said, 'He's playing rock'n'roll; listen to it'. I don't think I could have defined blues for you at the time."





Lightnin' Hopkins



Mississippi John Hurt

Lightnin' Hopkins led to Son House, Skip James, Robert Johnson...and on the LP, *Blues at Newport* (1964), Smither discovered the incomparable Mississippi John Hurt.

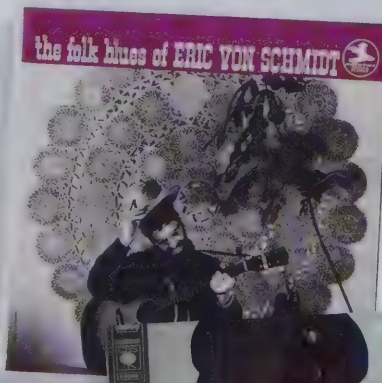
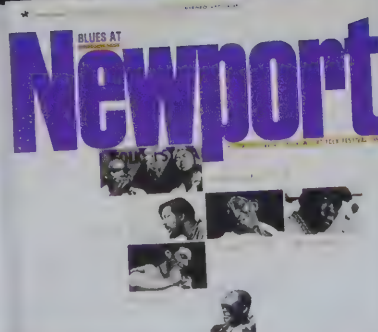
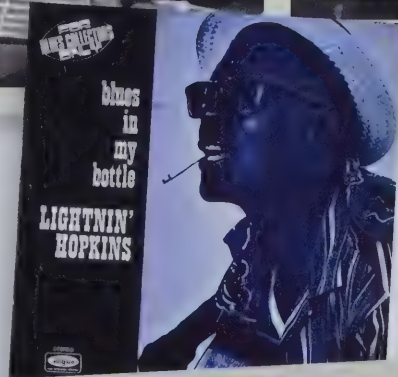
"He had that beautiful rolling style that sounds so easy but is very difficult to do. Lightnin' Hopkins, he's got this Texas dead-blues, bend-some blues style. But when I heard John Hurt for the first time I understood really true, syncopated finger picking. It was just a three-finger style; it was captivating to me. I just learned a ton. I think at one time I could play a version of every song he ever had."

**R**enewed interest in acoustic, country bluesmen in the U.S. in the early '60s ran parallel with the urban folk revival. Smither had a foot in each camp. Even in such a perceived backwater as New Orleans, he was fully aware of the Greenwich Village and Cambridge folk scenes and their leading lights, Bob Dylan and, most fortuitously, Eric Von Schmidt.

"I had a couple of friends that were into the whole blues revival and folk music. We were all collecting records and Eric Von Schmidt was in everybody's collection. Plus, Bob Dylan had said so famously on his first record: 'This is a song I learned from Rick Von Schmidt [*Baby Let Me Follow You Down*]'. "

While Smither continued to go through the motions at Tulane University, during spring break in 1964 a friend suggested they visit Von Schmidt at his winter home in Sarasota, FL.

"We drove over to Sarasota, which takes most of a day from New Orleans. I found his name in the phone book. I called him up and said, 'I'm Chris Smither. I'm a guitar player trying to write songs. I'm an admirer. I'd love to meet you.' And he said, 'Come on over.' So I went over to his house. He was living on Siesta Key at the time, a coastal island. He met us at the door and said, 'Come on in,' and handed us each a beer and the whole house was full of musicians. Most of Jim Kwe-



kin's Jug Band was there. I was in heaven. These were all my idols. These were people who were actually doing something that I only dreamed of.

"So they asked me to play a couple of songs. I did. And Eric was very encouraging. And he asked me where I lived. I said, 'New Orleans'. And he said, 'No one's going to hear you there; you've got to get up to New York and Cambridge—the folk scene up there.' I don't know if he had any idea of what impact that had on me but to me it was like God had spoken. I was told what I was supposed to do, so I did it."

Club 47 on Harvard Square lay at the very heart of the Cambridge folk scene. A calendar from July 1964 shows dates for the likes of The Jim Kweskin Jug Band, Tom Rush, Tim Hardin, Taj Mahal, Jesse Colin Young, The Kentucky Colonels...

**W**hile Smither made a guest appearance at the 1967 Newport Folk Festival with Taj Mahal at the last-minute insistence of photographer and blues promoter Dick Waterman—boyfriend of Smither's next-door neighbour and friend, Bonnie Raitt—he would not play Club 47 until the following year.

He still has the calendar for that month and proudly reads out the names covering the dates: Joni Mitchell, John Hartford, James Cotton, John Hammond, Richie Havens, Tim Buckley... On any given night, you might hear anyone from Howlin' Wolf to Bill Monroe.

"Club 47 was unbelievable. You walk into this little room and there





Eric Von Schmidt on the beach at Sarasota

they were. It almost made it commonplace, you know. It was almost like you couldn't realize how important these people were, otherwise what were they doing in Club 47, this tiny little room. To me, Club 47 was a shrine. Getting to play Club 47 was one of the most important nights of my life."

Bonnie Raitt, Tom Waits, Leo Kottke, and Jackson Browne would all open for Smither before he recorded his first LP, *I'm A Stranger Too!* (1970), for Poppy Records.

"I used to say the easiest way to become a big star is to open for Chris Smither in the Cellar Door in Washington, DC," he laughs.

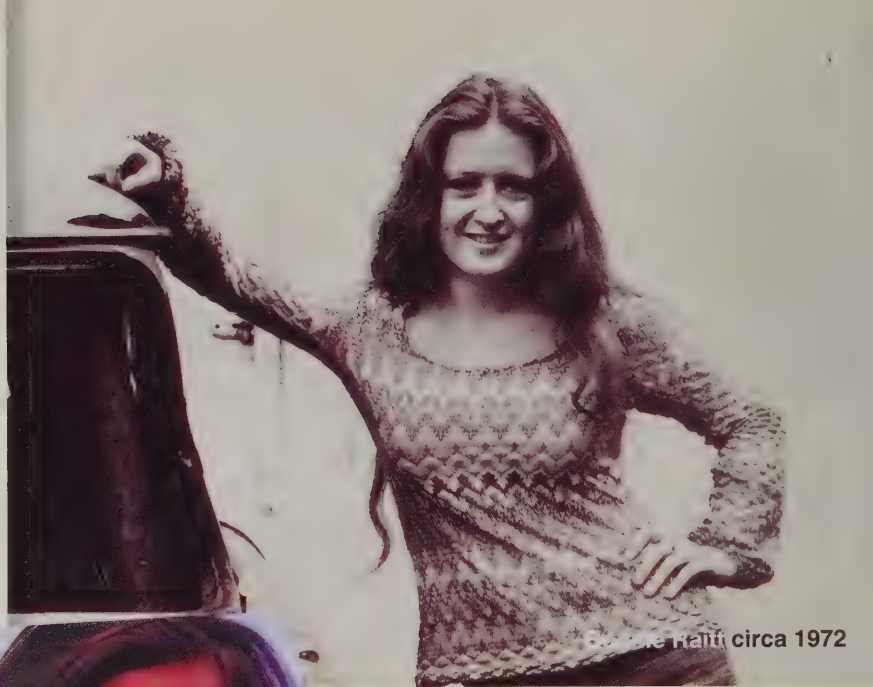
Oddly enough, Lightnin' Hopkins was also on Poppy's roster. Although they never met, both Hopkins and Smither had their album covers designed by the celebrated graphic designer Milton Glaser, who created the psychedelic Bob Dylan poster and the iconic, much-plagiarized I ❤️ N.Y. graphic.

"The guy that wound up producing my first two records for Poppy, Michael Cuscuna, he was a deejay on a free-form radio station. He brought me a Townes Van Zandt record and said, 'Have you heard this guy?' I said, 'Yeah, I have this record.' He said, 'Well, he's on Poppy Records.' He said, 'If they record him they ought to record you, too.' I went to see them and they said, 'Yeah, you are right up our alley.'"

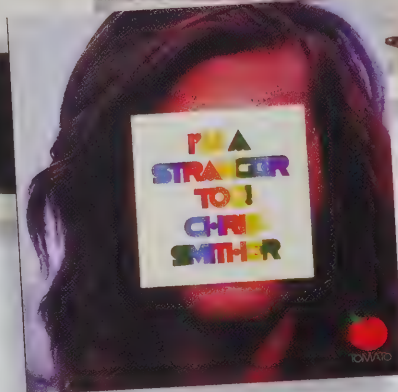
"Doc Watson was on there. Von Schmidt was on there, too. I got Von Schmidt the deal. I told the guy who ran Poppy Records, I said, 'Do you know who Eric Von Schmidt is?' He said, 'Sure.' I said, 'He's got a whole record's worth of new material and nobody to record for.' That was quickly taken care of."

Pay back?

"Precisely."



Bonnie Raitt circa 1972



Chris Smither made one more record for Poppy, *Don't It Drag On* (1971), and then nothing for 13 years. While he continued to perform occasionally, he also scrambled to make a living in construction. The reason was irrefutable.

"I spent about 12 years stuck in the bottom of a whisky bottle trying to figure how to get out of it.

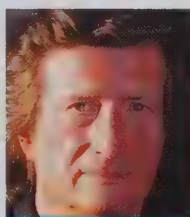
I was drinking myself to death. I didn't get out of that until about '85. I started drinking when I was 14. I just got tired of being a mess. My life was miserable. The question is: 'Am I going to die like this or am I going to get better?'"

"I look back on it now and my life is so much better. I have a hard time remembering just how hard it was. It's difficult, you know. It's hard to get well sometimes.

"But I suddenly came to a realization. It's funny, there was a woman I saw at various meetings, having to do with recovery, and we got to be sort of friends, and one day she said to me, 'Chris, I've been talking to you for a couple of months and I have no idea what you do.' 'Well, I'm a carp...' I started to say I'm a carpenter. Then I said, 'Actually, I'm a musician. Excuse me, I have to go and make a phone call.' I called up my boss and quit. I said, 'It's time to get back to what I'm supposed to be doing'."

In the meantime, Bonnie Raitt had recast the lyrics of *Love You Like A Man* to *Love Me Like A Man* and turned it into a showstopper. She initially recorded it on her LP *Give It Up* (1972)—an album that features Amos Garrett on trombone! And guitar. Diana Krall later covered it, too.

"Bonnie lived next door. But she was in Minneapolis making her record for Warner Bros. And she called me up at two in the morning. 'Chris! Are you sleeping?' 'No, not now.' She said, 'I want to do your song?' I said, 'Which one?' '*Love You Like A Man*, is that all right with you?' 'Sure, I'll rewrite it for you from a woman's point of view.' 'I've all ready done it.' I said, 'When are you recording it?' 'It's done.' I said, 'That's fine with me,' and I went back to sleep. She was happy.

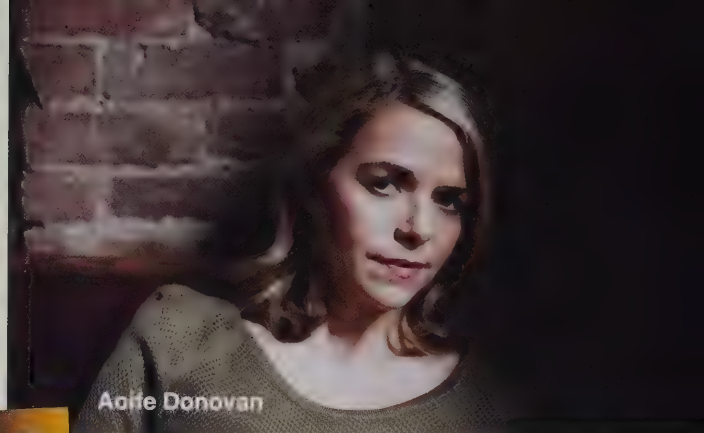


"I spent about 12 years stuck in the bottom of a whisky bottle trying to figure how to get out of it. I was drinking myself to death."





Allen Toussaint



Aoife Donovan

"It opened a lot of doors for me over the years, not to mention the money. When times were harder than they are now, those royalty cheques coming twice a year were important. When Diana Krall covered it, that was like gravy. By that time, I was doing pretty well. But it didn't hurt."

Once sober, Smither had a calling card. And rehab' clearly brought the best out of him.

While *It Ain't Easy* came out in 1984, it took seven more years before he released *Another Way To Find You*, but it marks the start of a regular cycle of truly impressive recordings, most of which provide the backbone to his exceptional *Still On The Levee* (2014)—a 50-year career retrospective of 25 original songs re-recorded in his native New Orleans with the likes of the imposing Allen Toussaint, Loudon Wainwright and band members from Morphine.

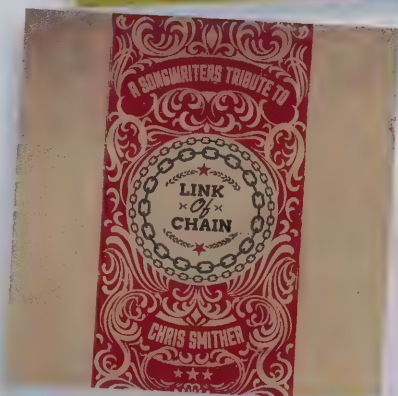
"It was interesting to see how hard it was to play some of those songs. I had to go back and learn them all over again. I was pleased that some of that stuff I had written when I was so young still stood up. I hadn't painted myself into any corners. It was a great time.

"We spent about three weeks doing it in New Orleans. That was the longest I spent there since I left when I was in my early 20s. It was just great getting back into it, the whole neighbourhood thing. We had a lot of people come in to help us out. It was wonderful to have Allen Toussaint come in and play. That was a high point."

Still, it would be amiss not to mention *Link of Chain: A Songwriters' Tribute to Chris Smither* (2014). Commissioned by Signature Sounds Records, it features such admirers as Bonnie Raitt, naturally, Josh Ritter, Dave Alvin, Tim O'Brien, Mary Gauthier, Peter Case, Patty Larkin... Absent, though, is Emmylou Harris, who recorded Smither's *Slow Surprise* for the movie *The Horse Whisperer*.

"I had no input whatsoever. It came as a big surprise to me. I loved it. Every single track on that record I thought was pretty good. Some of them were extraordinary. The job Aoife Donovan [and Stephanie Coleman] did on *Small Revelations*, that was amazing. I loved what David Alvin did on *Link of Chain*. I loved most of them. There were only a couple I didn't think were bad. I just thought they paled compared to some of the others."

Now with the release of *Call Me Lucky*, Smither heads out on the road.



As always, the first tour with a new record he does with a band. After that, it's solo most of the way. And while he has cut back the number of gigs from upwards of 250 a year to close to 100, the pleasure derived from performing live remains undiminished after all these years.

"Usually when I tour with a band it's exhilarating. I have a wonderful time, I really do. And when they go home I feel like I've taken off these big heavy boots and put my sneakers back on.

"It's still what I love to do. Sometimes I forget how much I love to do it until I stay off the road for a while. When I go back to it, I realize how much happier I am."



Smither, call me lucky



commitment to Stax Records before they went on to California to do their first record with Electra.... I went down to the studio and met them...and got to participate in that record with them....

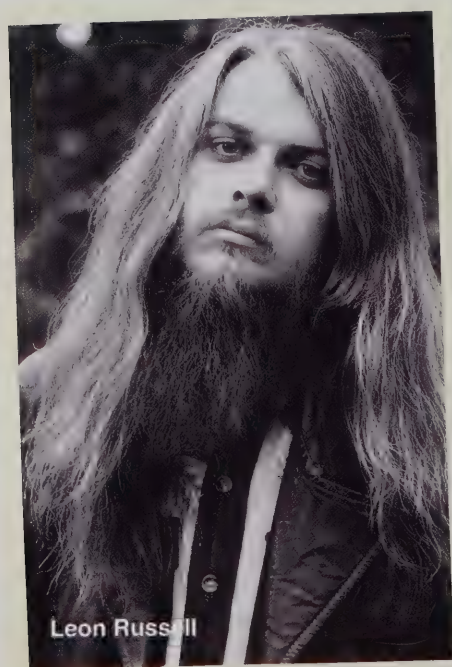
That was a big deal because when they left town, I was with 'em. They took me to California.

**Leon Russell was a bit of a kingmaker. He employed so many different people in different capacities...he got a lot of people work. And it was centered around his home, I believe, in Los Angeles. It's a really interesting part of your book, the scene around Leon Russell. Could you describe some of that and some of the wonderful people who were a part of that?**

Leon lived in a house called the Skyhill House, and his studio was Skyhill Drive Studio, which was in the house. There was just a constant flow of people.

I drove from Memphis to California with Leon in a blue Thunderbird convertible, like a '56. And going through Texas, Leon with his long grey hair and long grey beard, was not something that was going to be very attractive in Texas, so he just hunkered down most of the time and I drove [laughs].... It was just the strangest of experiences....

Not only was Joe Cocker and a lot of people recording at the Skyhill House, and Leon Russell and Marc Benno had their group, The Asylum Choir, were very active at that time.... The best musicians in the world wanted to play



Leon Russell



Ray Charles

with Leon, they wanted to be a part of what was going on at Skyhill Drive....

**Rita, can you tell us about...The Blackberries?**

The Blackberries were these three women—Sherlie Matthews, Clydie King, and Venetta Fields—who were THE background singers in Los Angeles when I arrived. They did all the sessions. All of them had sung, currently or in the past, with Ray Charles and everybody else making records in Los Angeles at the time. And to be able to get your foot in the door to do one session with The Blackberries was huge. And somehow or other, I became friends with these women, especially with Venetta Fields, who was like a sister to me (she lives in Australia now).

But at one point we were doing a session together and Venetta said, 'From now on, you're gonna be the fourth Blackberry, so if one of us can't make it you're gonna be the fourth one.' And that's literally how I got into doing session work in L.A., because if I was singing with The Blackberries then I must be OK. So people started calling me (and, of course, I would call them first, if they weren't busy).

But there were days when we would get up and work from 8 in the morning and just session to session to session 'til midnight. Just sessions all day long. And made a lawwwt of money [chuckles].

**You worked with some amazing people on those sessions. Could you tell us about a few of those people you worked with that you are very proud you worked with?**

I mentioned Ray Charles. Always, being

in the studio with Ray was such an education because we never knew what he was going to say, or what he was going to expect, or ask for. And he would have music charted out and we would read the music....

The morning of the big earthquake in Los Angeles, we had a Ray Charles session. And the first phone call I got was from one of the girls, Clydie King, and she said, 'You gonna make the session, ain't ya?' I said, 'Ya, I'll be there.' And I was the first one at the session that morning and I walked in and Ray—he knew people kinda from, I suppose, the way they smelled, the energy, or whatever—but I walked in and, in a shaky voice, I said, 'Good morning, Ray.'

He said, 'You sound a little bit shaky today.'

And I said, 'Well, there was a big earthquake this morning.'

He said, 'You can't live in California and let a little thing like an earthquake shake you up.' He said, 'You just settle down.' [Laughs]

And I'd been driving through glass. Driving down Western Avenue, the windows were in the street, and it was crazy. But he was very special to work with. I loved him.

And, of course, the famous *Love The One You're With* sessions with Stephen Stills and Graham Nash, and being introduced into that whole group of people, Mama Cass....

**In addition to being a great singer...what else did it take to be able to persevere and work in that environment, and to be a first-call singer working with people like Ray Charles and so many different other people? Obviously, your character lend itself to that, your understanding of studio technique, I suppose...do you have an answer for that, do you know what I mean, it's a...?**



You know what, I always felt like, for pretty much all my whole life I felt that there have been angels around me, and that I've been at the right place at the right time. Because I had lived in Memphis for a year before going to California and did some work singing jingles, so I could read music because I studied music from the time I was a kid.

You had to be able to read music because going into, like, a Herb Alpert session with 20 singers, and we're singing notes that rub against each other, and all these strange harmonies...absolutely being able to blend and being able to read music and being able to put people together, not just for their musical ability but how they're gonna kinda work in the studio and get along....

**Writing *Delta Lady*, and going over your life, and preparing for the amount of time that it would take, was it a joyful experience for you?**

You know, I thought it was gonna be when I started it. And I really had resisted writing because I knew that once I got started, because I've been here a looong time, that it was going to be an endless project....

When I'm on the road, I'm with my band all the time, and we're backstage, I'm always telling stories, in the dressing room or onstage. My drummer, Len Coulter, over the years, he just kept saying, 'You've got to write this stuff down, you've got to write a book', and he, literally, is the reason I wrote the book—he wore me down.

When I made the commitment to write the book, I felt like that I had had a life's experience—especially those times just growing up a preacher's kid, and having all of these years in music, and being in Memphis, and being in places at the right time—that I had kind of a unique point of view of how the music business worked, the good part and kind of the underbelly side.

But for me, mostly, the good part. I think that's been the blessing of being able to always realize that. As a matter of fact, there's one line in the book where I go to my deepest part of Buddhism and I said, 'In every pile of shit there's a pony' [laughter]. Because there always are blessings in everything that we do and everything we experience.

And reliving it was, kind of, it was really cathartic. In the middle of writing the book, my sister was killed. She was shot and killed by her husband, who then took his life. Of course, up to that point I had been writing the book about me and Priscilla because she was my best friend and my co-writer, and we did Walela

together, and so that was kind of "stop in the middle and go and take care of the family" and take care of all of that.

When I came back to it, I think that I was in a different kind of headspace and really wanted to be able to tell the story even more honestly. Because when I chose to write the book, and I was interviewing editors and book companies—I chose Harper Collins—my editor, Jennifer Barth, whom I finally chose, she said, 'If you sign with us, and you choose to do the book with us, I simply ask that you tell the truth.' And for me, that was the greatest starting place of all.

**One of the areas that you wrote about that kind of touched me was your songwriting credits, and lack of in certain cases, do you mind talking a bit about that?**

No, no, I've been ripped off [laughs]. Well, you know, I remember, I guess...it's happened so many times but I think the one that...well, we'll just go right to the *Layla* story....

That's the one where I was having my picture taken at A&M Studios for my first album cover, some promo pictures, when I heard my music come over the radio. I had written a song with drummer Jim Gordon, who had been part of Delaney/Bonnie, and we had written a song called *Time*. We had taken it and demo-ed it and taken it to England when we were touring with Delaney & Bonnie, and Eric Clapton was the guitar player in the band. And while we were over there we recorded...Eric's first solo album. And Jim and I took the song into the studio that day and played it for him, I played it on the piano and sang it. And we left the cassette and Eric seemed real interested in the song and I felt like he might cut it. And then didn't really hear anything else about it, so I assumed that somebody would have told me.

So I'm in the studio having photographs made and all of a sudden I hear this music come over the radio and...it's so familiar to me and all of a sudden I'm singing lyrics and realized what had happened, because then I heard 'Layyy-la'...it was the beginning of *Layla*, where it's the instru-



mental part, and then at the end, was actually my music.

And so I started trying to get in touch with Eric, which is impossible, still...trying to get in touch with his manager...Robert Stigwood. So I got a phone call through to Stigwood's office and he got on the phone and I explained my story. I said I wrote that song with Jim Gordon, and my name's not on the record.

He said, 'What are you going to do about it? You're a girrrl. You're going to go up against Stiggy and the organization? We've got deep pockets.'

And at that point, there really wasn't much I could do. I told the story over all these years. When the book came out, there were people writing things—which I try not read—'Well, why didn't you say something before now?' And I say, 'Well, I did.'

But now it's in the book. And still I haven't heard from Eric or his camp. So, I guess we're not really good friends.





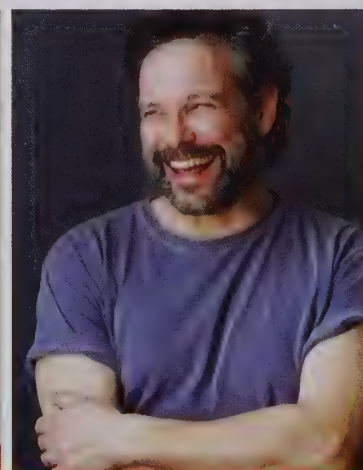
# Reviews



**60** The Wailin' Jennys



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**59** John Gorka





## Lankum

*Between The Earth And Sky* (Rough Trade)

## Stick In The Wheel

*Follow Me True* (Independent)



Raw: the most common word associated with Lankum and Stick In The Wheel—two bands deservedly flying high amidst a flurry of critical assessment for their gritty, uncompromising approach to folk music. And yet, both have their detractors.

Stick In The Wheel gets grief for Nicola Kearey's thick East End of London, Estuary accent and their no-holds-barred reclamation of local working-class folksongs. Live, they're caustically and flip-pantly hilarious: "This is a song we learned from a Martin Carthy YouTube," you'll hear them cack-

le. On record, they are as bold as brass, mixing traditional songs and tunes with their own uplifting tales of a *Blind Beggar* and the haunting *Red Carnation*, while brilliantly turning Nic Jones's *Lass of London City* into the riveting *White Copper Alley*. Equally compelling is Ian Carter's dynamic Dobro picking, pressing forward *Over Again* from its epic opening line: "The day I turned my life around was a day like any other..." A call and gorgeous choral response, sees out *Poor Old Horse*. And Kearey's due care and attention to the emotional, unaccompanied traditional *Unquiet Grave* ought to knock any ill-conceived notions of her singing into a cocked hat. The ingenious reinvention of *As I Roved Out* proves the biggest surprise of all, though, with its gorgeous, ghostly electronic wash and insect-like, click percussion.

Now two albums to the good, they've already raised the bar for

all of English folk to readjust their aspirations.

Lankum (formerly known as Lynched) on the other hand hail from the streets of north Dublin, and the knock against them is an ill-conceived reference to their instrumental inability.

But, as Si Kahn will gladly tell you, "It's what you do with what you've got." So a constant hypnotic single drone from Ian Lynch's uilleann pipes accompanies Radie Peat's all-encompassing voice highlighting the poverty and anguish on the traditional *What Will We Do When We Have No Money?* Hearing Peat for the first time plays havoc on the senses.

There's a natural, rich ornamentation to her singing that grips from the outset and dominates throughout the stark, original, famine-infused *The Granite Gaze* and *Willow Garden* (a.k.a. *Rose Connolly*). More overtly political than the Stick lot obviously, Lankum also set their teeth into a couple of classic anti-army recruitment, anti-fascist anthems—*Sergeant William Bailey* and a stripped-down *Peat Bog Soldiers*—with Ian Lynch's spiritually raw (there's that word again) but highly absorbing singing on each. His bitter assessment, that homegrown greed and corruption is the primary motive for Irish emigration today, on *Deanta In Eireann*, is both blunt, gritty, and yet not without the odd twist of

humour.

*Between The Earth And The Sky*, then, straddles the past and the Irish present and casts both into the harsh light of unsurpassed authenticity.

— By Roddy Campbell

## Calexico

*The Thread That Keeps Us* (Anti-/Epitaph)



If the current political situation in the country to the south of us has been good for

one thing, it's been lighting fires under the collective asses of its artists.

For example, Tex-Mex/Americana vets Calexico, who have based their ninth release around themes of ecology, immigration, and the current powers-that-be in their homeland (*Dead in the Water*). Lyrically they're on fire, and sonically they're wandering as far afield as their fervid imaginations can take them, which is far indeed.

The mariachi trumpets are still there (Flores y Tamales), but the band also dips its toes into hypnotic, motorik near-funk rhythms and Belew-style skronk a la mid-'80s Talking Heads (*Another Space*), while *Under the Wheels* wraps urgent psych touches around a Latin vibe, recalling Sandinista-era Clash.

An early contender for album of the year; they've always been an excellent band, but it might only be now that Calexico are finally opening up to their musical possibilities.

— By Tom Murray

## Bela Fleck & Abigail Washburn

*Echo in the Valley* (Rounder Records)



One of the delightful moments on this recording is in the fifth track, when both

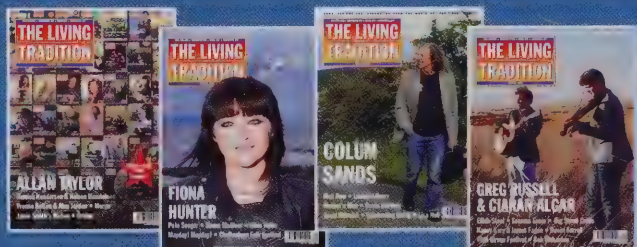
segue into a lovely take on Bela Fleck's *Big Country*. It's a tune he's presented himself a lot, most notably within the *Live from the Quick* release. It's not as challenging as some of the things he does,





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which makes it a nice entrée to what he does.

Moving between voicings, shifting chords here and there. That all takes on an added dimension here, playing with Abigail Washburn. She's a master of old-time banjo, he the master of everything else, and both add their separate personalities to the piece.

Washburn is more poetic, Fleck more rhythmic. She's more of a feel player, he more studied. That fifth track, a medley, is the only instrumental on the album, and too bad there aren't a couple more. Between them, they can do no wrong, of course, though this is a better release than their last one.

That one, their self-titled release, felt a bit rushed in a way, maybe an album for the sake of it. It was interesting for what it was—again, these two have the reputation as being masters, and it's a reputation that is earned—but this release, *Echo in the Valley*, feels more polished, maybe, more thoughtful, in a way. In all, it's a lovely way to while away a bit of time. They are interested in opening a big piece of musical territory, and they do.

— By Glen Herbert

## The Confabulation

Tunnels and Visions (Woodhead Music)



Toronto's David Woodhead may be one of Canada's best-kept secrets for both his breadth of musical imagination and wide experience, with credits as a bassist, strummer, engineer, or producer on some 250 records at last count for artists as varied as Oliver Schroer, David Francey, Stan Rogers, and De Temps Antan, to name a few.

This second set from Woodhead's Confabulation band (Doug Wilde, Bob Cohen, Colleen Allen, Rich Greenspoon, Anne Lindsay) takes a jazz framework but elements of folk and classical, funk and fusion and another dozen guest soloists are woven into its soaring pastoral soundscapes so you would be perplexed to label it under any one genre.

All the tunes are Woodhead originals excepting adaptations of Erik Satie and the lone, haunting vocal track, Frank Loesser's *Inchworm*. The leader's rubberized fretless bass packs a recurring shot of momentum to this dreamy, exotic journey.

— By Roger Levesque

## The Lynnes

Heartbreak Song for the Radio (Independent)



It's two Lynnes, two Lynnes in one as dual singer/songwriters Lynne Hanson and Lynn

Miles throw together for an enjoyable set of efficient country-rock tunes. There's a pop sensibility at work here as well, one that lifts tracks such as *Cold Front* and *Blue Tattoo* up above the competition, near-radio candy that hums with professional ease.

It's very evident that both Miles and Hanson could flip over to AOR or hot country, but they seem intent on another kind of alchemical reaction, one that allows for something just a little grittier.

Stylistically, they fit into any number of spots; you could hear Blue Rodeo wrapping their tongues around *Cost So Much*, while *Dark Waltz* has sparkly hints of Mary Gauthier in its exoskeleton. Satisfying throughout; aside from the title track, where hearts are laid bare, they settle into a mid-tempo groove that suits them perfectly.

— By Tom Murray

## Good Lovelies

Shapeshifters (Independent)



After over a decade of establishing themselves as a sturdy little folk unit, Toronto's Good Lovelies have decided that the time is ripe for a musical re-imagining.

Not that they've ditched the elements that have stood them in good stead since forming back in 2006; the three-piece are still immaculate harmonizers, putting voices and pointed, melancholy



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lyrics at the forefront of the song.

What they have done is slicked up the sound on their sixth full length, *Shapeshifters*, adding an adult contemporary sheen to the project.

First single, *I See Gold*, finds the trio of Caroline Brooks, Kerri Ough, and Sue Passmore singing over a muted but snappy electro beat while bare funk elements pop around them, while the mournful *Daylight* is a cloud of piano, snare, and synth clouds.

The overall mood is wistful, the over-arching themes mortality and maturity, and an ache barely hidden by sweet voices. Likely to be a bit of a surprise to longtime fans, but rest assured that at base the Good Lovelies haven't changed a great deal.

— By Tom Murray

## Altan

The Gap of Dreams (Compass)



After 30 years of playing and recording, most Altan fans will have particular expectations of *The Gap of Dreams*, expectations that are somewhat confounded.

Gone is the dabbling with synthetic and orchestral textures and guest artists that dragged down some of their more recent outings (in my opinion). What remains is top-drawer playing, singing, and composing, music from the Irish tradition interspersed with some of

their own originals.

The lineup is as strong as ever: Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh, Ciarán Tourish and Curran, Mark Kelly, Dáithí Sproule, and Martin Tourish (the newest-comer, replacing Dermot Byrne on accordion). It's a real back-to-basics outing with some wonderful songs and tunes in the Donegal style. Good to see them in such form, very deserving of our attention once again.

Love it.

— By Richard Thornley

## Planxty

One Night in Bremen (Made In Germany Music)



This is a gem from the band frequently reckoned to be most influential band in the history of traditional Irish music.

The original four-piece of Andy Irvine, Christy Moore, Dónal Lunny, and Liam O'Flynn are joined by Matt Molloy on this previously unreleased concert recording. There's the expected mix of Irish traditionals and music from other cultures, all performed at the Bremen University canteen 40 years ago.

Things get off to a flying start with Moore leading the band through a mighty rendition of *The Pursuit Of Farmer Michael Hayes*. This is followed by a fine set of slip jigs and then Irvine takes the mic to perform a typically lilting version of *The Bonny Light Horseman*. Moore's version of *Raggle*

*Taggle Gypsy* is authoritative and is followed by a swinging and swaying version of *Tabhair Dom Do Lámh*.

The guitar and twin bouzoukis propel much of the set and the instrumental melodies sparkle throughout. The recording is a little rough around the edges, with some off-mic comments from the band leaking into the mix, and a few minor hiccups here and there. All of which just adds to the charm and the feeling of authenticity. All you have to do is close your eyes and listen and you'll feel like you were really there!

— By Tim Readman

## Big Little Lions

Alive and Well (Far Flung Records)



Big Little Lions, the cross-border musical partnership of Helen Austin and Paul

Otten, have produced a timely selection of songs that capture the troubling times we are in, but with

at least a little hope for the future.

Mostly upbeat, and pop-infused, with folky gang vocals and hand clapping/foot stomping cues, the songs on *Alive and Well* feel big. The layers of harmonies call to mind bigger folk acts such as The Lumineers, or The Head and the Heart.

The album begins with an anthem about finding your people, your tribe, to help you be your best self. It's a song that could easily be the singalong anthem of a summer of road trips and festivals.

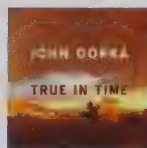
Politics finds its way into much of the album, the lyrics touching on more serious topics while the pop edge of the songs keeps you feeling fine. The haunting *Unicorn* asks us to "wake me when the word is sober / tell me when this show is over" — lamenting the state of things, the rarity of human connection, and indeed, simple humanity.

It's a theme we also see in the nostalgia of *Static*, reminiscing about just "hanging around" as children and teens. All in all, *Alive and Well* is a wonderful and cohesive album from two already award-winning songwriters. Expect more of the same recognition for this one.

— By Tanya Corbin

## John Gorka

True In Time (Blue Chalk Records)



Recorded in a three-day span over the mid-summer of 2017, *True In Time* finds

veteran folk craftsman John Gorka summoning his considerable melodic and lyrical powers for







Mavis Staples

12 tunes about dogs, Mennonite girls, and the strange confluence of Paul Simon lyrics with the deaths of Carrie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds.

Well, that's the surface version of these songs, which Gorka invests with metaphysical wonder, performed by a sympathetic six-piece (with a large cast of guest vocalists), and brushed with the special magic that only a live-off-the-floor session can give.

With the exception of *The Body Parts Song*, a frivolous throwaway that probably kills at festivals, the mood is by turns thoughtful and heartfelt, with *Fallen For You* and *Arroyo Seco* fine examples of both his pared-down wit and tunefulness.

They're not intended to be bonus tracks, but it's hard not to look at

*Blues with A Rising Sun* and *Red Eye & Roses*, lost compositions that Gorka only recently rediscovered, as such. They're both minor gems, mood pieces that shows Gorka's songwriting at its finest.

— By Tom Murray

## The Wailin' Jennys

Fifteen (Red House Records)



The Wailin' Jennys is one of those groups that causes lots of people to fall all over themselves with praise. And they're absolutely right to.

Truly, you can't say enough good things about them. It starts here: they wrote *One Voice*. Their latest release will cause lots of praise, too, just as it should.

When I heard that they were

doing a collection of cover songs, I'll admit to feeling a bit disappointed. Sometimes covers are the things that people do when they are feeling a bit at sea.

Not so with *Fifteen*. The songs here don't all announce themselves as covers, which is part of the project. They've really brought their considerable powers of arrangement to these, and have chosen the tunes so well that the project doesn't feel like the presentation of other people's work, but rather their work.

That they do *Boulder to Birmingham* is itself a master stroke, and it is masterfully done. *Loves Me Like a Rock* is a bit of a high-wire act. It's like they're taking it on for the challenge it presents. "Think we can't bring something new to this chestnut?" Think again. It brings shivers. The whole album does.

I'm tempted to fall all over myself with praise, but better is just for you to listen to the work. You simply must. Crikey, these women are a national treasure, and this album just confirms it.

— By Glen Herbert

## Mavis Staples

If All I Was Was Black (Anti-)



This third meeting between Mavis Staples and Jeff (Wilco) Tweedy turns out to be their most potent collaboration yet, an explicit political statement with 10 new songs the guitarist/producer wrote for the singer and civil rights music icon. The issue of racism in America is front and centre.

It's hard not to feel echoes of The Staples' pioneering repertoire from the 1960s, complete with a female backing chorus on most tracks, but Tweedy's arrangements bring a contemporary edge that straddles gospel traditions with chugging rock and blues grooves, and hints of country twang. There were points I wanted it to break out into a full-throttle funk thing but edgy Americana will do.

The hard-hitting pulse of *Who*

*Told You That*, *No Time For Crying*, and *Try Harder* deliver the best sense of urgency, anger, and frustration that's bound up in this fight, caught with a full band.

But with a call to action, Staples reminds us that change must happen through peaceful means, with love in your heart on *Peaceful Dream*. That's how she's come this far, age 78, with no regrets, as we hear on the poignant closer *All Over Again*. It's a marvellous fight.

— By Roger Levesque

## Ian A. Anderson

Deathfolk Blues Revisited (GFTB Records)



Britain's other Ian Anderson is 70 years old and instrumental to the growth and popularity of acoustic country blues since first hitting the coffee houses and speakeasys of the mid-'60s—and he's still at it.

Having performed in all manner of duos, trios, and full country blues and roots bands, this release reflects a documentation of his more solo self, featuring the favourite songs he's made his own over the past half-century.

In his spare time, he's birthfather to, and editor of, the formidable *fRoots* magazine—which more than hints at his knowledge and relevancy. Equipped with little more than the basics—live takes with a single microphone—Anderson accompanies himself on acoustic and resonator guitars.

Launching with his version of Big Bill Broonzy's *Keep Your Hands Off Her*, updated towards more modern tastes, his playing rises well above his vocal finesse, yet his affection for the music is clear.

If you recognize *A Fool Such As I*, it's likely because the last time you heard Bill Trader's original composition, Elvis Presley struck gold with it. It's no surprise to understand that this hardcore roots fan was first captured by Hank Snow's version recorded in '53.

Everyone from The Byrds to Dock Boggs has covered the tradi-



The Wailin' Jennys



tional murder ballad *Pretty Polly*, yet Anderson's version resounds with ringing fingerstyle guitar, his vocals well suited to its English storytelling.

Merging approaches as disparate as Muddy Waters, John Hammond, and Mose Allison, Anderson delivers on *I Love The Life I Live*, his voice resembling, at times, that much-loved, drunken uncle from parental parties.

His contribution to this specific genre of music may outweigh his actual abilities in some circles, yet—as this too-short, eight-song sampler proves—his enthusiasm, dedication, and earnest conviction to the music reveals a formidable character who'd likely prove exhilarating in any live setting.

— By Eric Thom

## Sean McCann

*There's a Place* (Independent)



Sean McCann's solo projects have tell of a man haunted by a past, using music to

heal his own hurts. Upon leaving Great Big Sea, McCann acknowledged a problem with alcoholism and a secret past of abuse.

*There's a Place*, produced by Jeremy Fisher and featuring the beautiful voice of Nova Scotia singer/songwriter Meaghan Smith, is his fifth solo album, seeing him coming out the other side but always working the process.

Emotional and haunting, his lyrics and voice speak to all of us—anyone who has had their own struggles with alcoholism or mental health.

The ballad singer of Great Big Sea, and always known for his standout vocal strength, McCann now uses his voice to advocate for others who are struggling. These new songs have a hopeful and upbeat theme throughout, a sense of finding home that anyone can relate to.

"Today I am a not a victim, but a survivor," says McCann, and his clear, pure vocals echo with resilience.

— By Tanya Corbin



## Elizabeth and the Catapult

*Keepsake* (Compass Records)



Elizabeth and the Catapult isn't like anything we've previously heard on Alison

Brown and Garry West's Compass Records. The Elizabeth in question is Elizabeth Ziman from Brooklyn, who studied classical piano at the Berklee College of Music.

Her original plans to pursue film scoring were sidetracked when Patti Austin recruited her as a backup singer. Other influences have been Esperanza Spalding (who played bass in her first band) and Lucius drummer Dan Molad, who produces the most tracks on this disc. Lucius might be a relevant comparison because this disc, unlike most of Compass's output, isn't in the folk/Americana/singer-songwriter/instrumental mould.



While the lyrics are certainly written out, the sound is grounded firmly in a positive echo-ey pop sensibility. The impression is not of songs written on guitar or piano to be performed live. The lyrics are sung there and recordings built up around them by adding tracks, beats, some chords, bass notes, strings, backing vocals, etc. as support. It's certainly one way to work in today's recording environment (and has been used since recording studios have existed) to much success.

Songs on this disc such as *Mea Culpa*, *Method Acting*, and *Better Days* are strong and proof that the method can work. A possible exception is *Land Of Lost Things*, which does sound like it was written on the piano.

It will be interesting to see how Ziman's writing and singing progress if she tours behind this disc and finds herself in more traditional performance situations.

— By Barry Hammond

## Talisk

*Abyss* (Independent)



Talisk have an image and know how to project it: from their striking album art to the very stylish delta replacing the "a" in the band's name, this is a band that's all about NEW!

An instrumental three-piece (concertina, fiddle, guitar), their sound is more reminiscent of

outfits such as Flook and Spiro than some of their more traditional brethren.

The playing is tight and dry, filled out by guests on pipes, bodhran, violin, and cello. Inspirations draw from all over the British Isles; there are tunes here from Niall Vallely, the late Angus Grant, Ian Carr, Andy Cutting, and John Martin (can't fault their taste!).

It's heady, airy stuff that bridges the worlds of folk and more exploratory musics quite nicely. And far more positive an outing than the title, *Abyss*, would suggest. Coming soon to a country near you (I hope).

— By Richard Thornley

## Chris Smither

*Call Me Lucky* (Signature Sounds)



Some musicians need to be told when it's time to retire but Chris Smither only gets

better with age. At 73, back with his first album of new songs in six years, everything is not just intact but even more haunting.

It's a long one, too. Eleven tracks on disc one feature this effortless master of folk blues accompanied by multi-instrumentalists David Goodrich or Matt Lorenz, and ex-Morphine drummer Billy Conway. Some fiddle here, a little piano there, all to enhance but never obscure the deeper messages coming through, and when they find a simple swinging shuffle it's riveting.

How does this humble poet of timeless themes never repeat himself? Covers of *Maybelline*, *Sitting On Top Of The World*, and even Lennon and McCartney virtually re-invent those tunes as you probably know them.

Then you get to disc two, which features him re-interpreting five originals heard on disc one, and it's amazing how different they are.

When Smither and company plug in for the remake of *Everything On Top* it's what fans might have dreamt of but never guessed they would get to hear.

— By Roger Levesque



## Laura Cortese & the Dance Cards

California Calling (Compass Records)



This indie-folk-pop record is an elegant, eccentric gem. Cortese's group is a quartet of female string players—fiddle, cello, bass, and banjo—that serves as a unique platform for her songs, which range from quirky takes on traditional, such as *Swing and Turn (Jubilee)*, to straight-forward, rhythm-driven rock 'n' roll on *Stockholm*.

There is a nod to '70s California pop rock with the title track, *California Calling*, driven by the percussively plucked string section standing in for the more conventional rock band. This is great stuff.

Then there are the vocals. This band's next record could be a cap-

pella and that would be OK. The Dance Cards' harmonies are good and lovely, that's for sure. Check out *Rhododendron*. Cortese, a Berklee College grad, has backed



up the likes of Pete Seeger, Rose Cousins, and the Band of Horses but her new role as a violin-playing, singer/songwriting band leader suits her. Buy this record and pray they show up at a folk festival near you.

— By Eric Rosenbaum

## Letters

### Re : Kumbaya, A Point of View, Issue No. 76

I am so happy you wrote / published this piece! Thank you David Newland. I feel exactly as you do, and I cringe each time I heard the 'kumbaya moment' phrase, silently being frustrated that they were entirely distorting the point of the song. And, ironically, I have been planning to draft my own opinion piece and send it in—and had set aside time yesterday evening to

finally get to it. Then the current issue arrives!

You said exactly what needed to be said, and Eve Golberg's comment as well, about the consequences of songs being divorced from their context, is right on.

Kumbaya is such a heart-wrenchingly powerful song. The conditions under slavery were so appalling, and here is one slave pleading to not be invisible, to actually be noticed and hopefully delivered of some compassion, by a god he/she still believes in: "Come By Here, My Lord!" The song is a cry for recognition, a hope to be treated like a human being. The very last thing it's about is some 'touchy-feely' crap.

— Grit Laskin, Toronto, ON.

*Penguin Eggs welcomes letters. Please address to penguineggs@shaw.ca*

## Critiques

### The Lynnes

Heartbreak Song for the Radio (Indépendant)



Il y a deux Lynnes, deux Lynnes pour le prix d'une depuis que le duo d'auteures-compositrices-interprètes Lynne Hanson et Lynn Miles ont uni leurs efforts pour sortir un album country rock aux chansons efficaces. On sent une sensibilité pop à l'œuvre dans cet album, de celle qui s'élève au-dessus de la compétition, comme dans les chansons *Cold Front* et *Blue Tattoo*, qui s'apparentent aux chansons bonbon qu'on fredonne avec une facilité professionnelle tellement elles passent à la radio.

Les Lynnes pourraient facilement tomber dans un rock plus commercial (AOR) ou dans le hot country, mais elles semblent à la recherche d'un autre genre de réaction alchimique, qui produirait un son juste un peu plus brut.

Au niveau du style, le leur peut entrer dans différentes cases; *Blue Rodeo* aurait pu chanter une chanson comme *Cost So Much*,

alors que *Dark Waltz* fait penser à Mary Gauthier. À part pour la chanson titre, où elles mettent leur cœur à nu, les Lynnes ont adopté un tempo modéré qui leur convient parfaitement. Cet album est satisfaisant d'un bout à l'autre.

— Par Tom Murray

— Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard

### Sean McCann

There's a Place (Indépendant)



Les projets solos de Sean McCann racontent l'histoire d'un homme hanté par son passé, guérissant ses blessures avec la musique.

Après avoir quitté *Great Big Sea*, McCann a reconnu avoir un problème d'alcool et avoir été victime d'abus par le passé, passé qu'il avait jusqu'alors tenu secret.

*There's a Place*, produit par Jeremy Fisher et mettant de l'avant la magnifique voix de l'auteure-compositrice-interprète Meaghan Smith, est son cinquième album solo, qui marque sa sortie du tunnel, bien qu'il soit toujours en cheminement.

Ses paroles et sa voix poignantes s'adressent à chacun de nous, et à chaque personne ayant eu des problèmes d'alcool ou de santé mentale.

Celui qui est connu pour sa puissance vocale remarquable et qui chantait des ballades au sein de *Great Big Sea* chante maintenant au nom de tous ceux qui luttent pour s'en sortir. Le thème des nouvelles chansons est toujours entraînant et plein d'espoir et parle de retrouver son chez-soi, un sujet qui interpelle tout le monde.

« Aujourd'hui, je ne suis plus une victime, je suis un survivant », affirme McCann, et son chant clair et pur résonne de résilience.

— Par Tanya Corbin

— Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard





# À la rencontre de Rosemary Lawton

Quand Rosemary Lawton avait sept ans, son école a reçu la visite d'un quatuor à cordes, et c'est à ce moment que son amour pour le violon s'est déclaré. Ses parents l'ont inscrite au Suzuki Talent Education Program (STEP), un programme d'éducation qui en plus d'enseigner la musique classique pour cordes, donne des cours de violon dans la tradition de Terre-Neuve sous la direction de l'experte violoniste Christina Smith.

« J'ai appris beaucoup d'airs de Terre-Neuve et j'ai adoré ça », rapporte Rosemary. « Je me considère très chanceuse d'avoir pu faire partie des violonistes de STEP; j'ai réalisé à quel point ce genre de programme était rare quand j'ai été plus vieille. »

Rosemary Lawton a obtenu un diplôme en musique de l'Université Memorial en 2016. Cet été-là, elle et deux de ses amies avaient décroché des emplois comme musiciens à temps plein au Anchor Inn à Twillingate, où elles jouaient devant les touristes, partageant avec eux la culture locale par la musique et le conte.

Loin de Saint John, sans accès au wifi, à la télévision et sans voiture, Rosemary marchait sur la plage pendant le jour et s'y asseyait pour jouer de la musique.

« J'avais suivi un cours de composition et un cours d'orchestration à l'école de musique, et j'avais appris comment faire l'orchestration des quatuors à cordes, des orchestres, des groupes de jazz, tout! J'ai vraiment aimé ça, je trouvais ça très intéressant. J'allais à la plage, où il n'y avait aucune distraction, et je travaillais sur les harmonies. »

Inspirée par le paysage bucolique d'un magnifique petit port isolé, Rosemary a amassé assez de matériel pour un enregistrement. Pour mener à bien son projet, elle a approché le producteur Ian Foster et recruté une excellente équipe de musiciens maîtrisant les styles classiques et traditionnels.

Le microalbum de six pièces intitulé *Painted Glass*, paru en 2017, présente un jeune artiste connaissant bien son instrument et possédant une voix prenante et un talent pour la création d'arrangements authentiques et nouveaux.

Rosemary trouve également son équilibre dans un répertoire qui met de l'avant la culture musicale actuelle et passée de Terre-Neuve : « Je voulais qu'il y ait quelques airs traditionnels, mais je ressentais également le besoin de jouer des airs plus modernes. J'ai parlé à Dave Panting et il a été vraiment gentil de me permettre de jouer un ensemble qu'il avait écrit et qui n'avait pas encore été enregistré. En plus, dans un de mes cours à l'école, il fallait que j'écrive une musique de film pour un court métrage, et c'est de là que vient *Movie Jigs*. »

Rosemary étudie en enseignement de la musique, mais elle a une année plutôt occupée en perspective puisqu'elle projette de donner aussi des spectacles. Cet été, elle voyagera au Portugal avec les Celtic Fiddlers et donnera des concerts avec le groupe

Perfect Strangers. Elle travaille aussi sur une tournée pour son dernier EP.

« J'ai fait jouer le CD par tout le groupe pour le lancement et pour quelques autres spectacles, mais c'est trop cher de partir en tournée à Terre-Neuve avec un si gros groupe, alors je travaille avec un guitariste nommé Taylor Wall pour présenter une version avec moins d'instruments que sur le CD. »

Rosemary Lawton continue également d'écrire, et a déjà commencé à travailler sur un album complet de musique originale.

– Par Jean Hewson







## Beppe Gambetta

**Le Doc Watson a changé la vie de ce maître de la guitare italien qui chante maintenant en quatre langues et reprend Giuseppe Verdi.**

**Par Roger Levesque**

**B**eppe Gambetta n'est pas qu'un grand musicien. Après avoir fait de la musique pendant 50 ans, il bénéficie maintenant d'une conception du domaine beaucoup plus large.

« Je continue à rechercher les vieilles et magnifiques pièces qu'il faut redécouvrir », m'a-t-il expliqué lors d'une conversation récente lors d'une de ses tournées en Californie.

Nous devons à Gambetta le regard neuf qu'il a jeté sur les divers univers musicaux qu'il a

découvert lors de ses « recherches », qui l'ont mené à New York et l'ont ramené jusqu'à nous.

La dernière preuve de talent de l'Italien s'intitule *Short Stories* (Borealis Records), un album dans lequel le guitariste éclectique explore des traditions issues de chaque côté de l'océan Atlantique et chante en quatre langues. À 63 ans, après près de 30 ans d'enregistrement, il nous offre l'une de ses œuvres les plus internationales.

Vous y trouverez des clins d'œil à l'Italie du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans une aria de Giuseppe Verdi, et à la ville de Gênes du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle dans *Jamin-a*, une reprise de l'icône vénérée de la chanson folk dans cette ville, Fabrizio De Andre. Il chante de la pop française en allemand, un clin d'œil à la vie sur la route, et présente des pièces bluegrass sous différents angles, objets de sa fascination pour le Nouveau Monde, dont un pot-pourri des chansons de Doc Watson. Qu'importe le style, tout se mélange à la façon Gambetta.

Pour retracer le fil disparate des événements, commençons avec la jeunesse de Giuseppe (Beppe) Gambetta à Gênes, une ville portuaire au nord de l'Italie, ouverte aux influences internationales pendant des siècles.

Ses parents adorent la musique classique et lui offrent une guitare classique à l'âge de 11 ans. La scène musicale à cette époque tournait principalement autour des auteurs-compositeurs-interprètes, se rappelle-t-il, mais il était plus attiré par Led Zeppelin et les albums folks américains difficiles à trouver. Un album mettant en vedette Peter Seeger et Doc Watson au festival folk de Newport a eu une énorme influence sur lui.

« Je me sentais comme si je venais de tomber en amour instantanément. Les solutions rythmiques qu'ils proposaient avaient quelque chose de si beau et de si simple. »

Des années plus tard, lors de ses premiers voyages en Amérique du Nord vers la fin des années 80, Gambetta rencontre Watson, le



grand maître du flatpicking (« un vrai gentleman »), et a l'honneur de jouer avec lui dans des festivals, ainsi qu'avec plusieurs de ses « héros », comme Norman Blake, Tony Rice, David Grisman et d'autres maîtres du bluegrass. Quand Watson décède en 2012, Gambetta va à son enterrement.

« J'ai décidé qu'il avait changé tant de choses dans ma vie que je devais lui faire mes adieux. Le cercueil était ouvert et j'ai touché son bras droit, en pensant à toute la musique que cet homme avait composée. »

Bien avant que Gambetta n'envahisse l'Amérique, il explorait déjà ses obsessions à la maison. À l'adolescence et dans la vingtaine, il transcrit des enregistrements et publie son premier livre en italien sur le flatpicking en 1983. Intrigué par Leo Kotke et Stefan Grossman, il commence à étudier d'autres styles de jeu de guitare comme le fingerpicking. Après avoir fait ses débuts à l'adolescence dans des groupes de rock, il fonde un groupe italien qui se consacre au bluegrass américain de 1978 appelé Red Wine.

Il se souvient être allé dans les états du sud des États-Unis comme la Géorgie dès 1985, mais son voyage le plus important pour sa carrière a lieu en 1989. À l'époque, on pouvait voyager partout aux États-Unis en avion pour seulement 400 \$ avec le statut de « passager sans réservation » pendant 24 jours. Lors de ce voyage, ses contacts aux États-Unis lui permettent d'emprunter l'un des premiers enregistreurs numériques portatifs. Ça y est, le sort en est jeté.

La musique sert d'ambassadeur à Gambetta, lui qui apprend toujours l'anglais, et lui permet de rencontrer des musiciens faisant partie du circuit des festivals comme Norman Blake, Mike Marshall, Dan Crary, David Grier, et d'autres musiciens expérimentés intrigués par cet Italien qui avait tant de prédisposition pour le bluegrass. Bien qu'il soit « trop gêné » pour approcher Watson et Rice, il réussit à enregistrer assez de matériel pour créer son premier album, *Dialogs*. Des années plus tard, il retrouve des copies illégales de son album en Chine, contenant toutes les notes d'accompagnement en mandarin, ce qui en dit long sur la qualité de l'album.

Cette anecdote donne le ton de la recette Gambetta, qui n'a pas changé à ce jour, qui se compose de visites régulières aux États-Unis et au Canada, maintenant plusieurs fois par année, souvent pour donner des spectacles avec des collaborateurs dans des festivals, et parfois pour faire des enregistrements complets.

Selon Gambetta, ces premiers voyages en Amérique du Nord étaient essentiels pour assimiler les bonnes techniques de base du

bluegrass, et en plus, le contraste culturel le divertissait. Grâce à *Dialogs*, sa réputation franchit les frontières de l'Europe, et en 1989, à l'époque où on appelait l'Europe de l'Est le « rideau en fer », il joue devant une foule de 25 000 personnes à Pilsen, une ville appartenant alors à la Tchécoslovaquie.

Au fil des ans, la balance oscille entre la fascination et la recherche alors que Gambetta incorpore des touches américaines, italiennes, ukrainiennes, celtiques et autres. On sent bien la maturation de son art sur son premier album studio *Good News From Home* paru sous l'étiquette américaine Green Linnet et produit par Mike Marshall en 1995. Il a même touché à la guitare gitane et au blues pour cet album.

« Chaque genre de musique acoustique m'apparaissait comme un trésor à découvrir, mais à partir de 1995, j'ai commencé à devenir plus qu'une copie européenne de musiciens américains comme Doc Watson. J'ai commencé à être moi-même, à faire de la composition et des arrangements. Au cours de la même période, j'avais envie de faire de la recherche sur l'histoire de la musique folk italienne et européenne. »

En collaboration avec Carlo Alonzo, il réalise *Serenata* (1997), son premier regard sérieux sur les traditions italiennes plus anciennes pour instruments à cordes. Pour *Synergia* (2000), où il reprend le répertoire de Doc Watson, il donne une série de concerts avec Dan Crary, en sol européen cette fois. Avec *Traversata* (2001), Gambetta traverse les continents d'une autre manière, s'attardant à la musique italienne en Amérique, aussi récente que la musique de Nino Rota composée pour *Le parrain*, et met à contribution les musiciens Carlo Alonzo et David Grisman tout en jouant d'une harpe-guitare fabriquée pour l'occasion.

Il participe au collectif Men Of Steel [les hommes qui jouent de la guitare hawaïenne, une guitare avec des cordes d'acier aussi appelée steel guitar] en compagnie du Californien Dan Crary, du Canadien Don Ross et de l'Écossais Tony McManus pour deux albums éclectiques. L'amitié de Gambetta avec McManus (maintenant établi en Ontario, Canada) s'est développée grâce à l'album *Round trip* (2015, Borealis) et aux tournées du duo.

Aujourd'hui, le maître de la guitare peut passer jusqu'à 250 jours sur la route chaque année, et passe tant de temps en Amérique du Nord que son épouse et lui ont pris un petit appartement au New Jersey en complément de leur maison à Gênes.

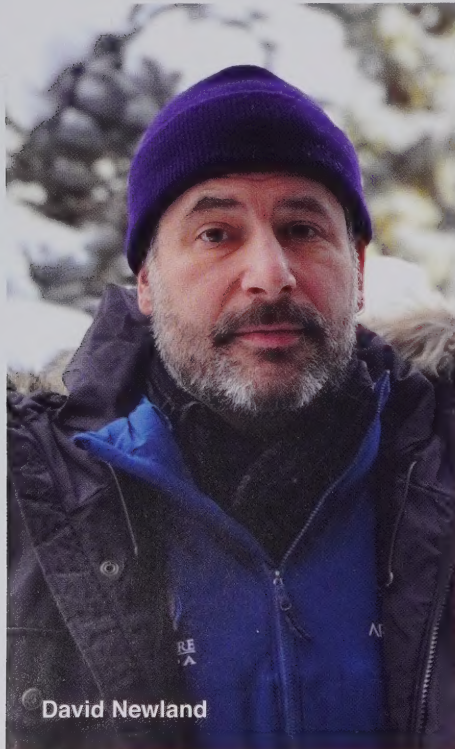
Gambetta ne fait pas que donner des spectacles, il donne également un atelier annuel sur le flatpicking en Slovénie depuis maintenant 23 ans. De plus, le mois de mai marquera la 18e année des Nuits acoustiques à Gênes, un festival qu'il organise avec sa femme Fédérica et qui présente des joueurs d'instruments à cordes chevronnés dans un théâtre de 100 places lors d'un spectacle diffusé par la radio italienne depuis maintenant cinq ans. Le festival de cette année mettra en vedette le Canadien James Keelaghan, entre autres.

On trouve une courte citation de Gambetta dans les notes de *Shorts Stories* qui parle de la « folie du monde ». Il admet qu'il pensait plutôt au chaos de faire de la musique et de la mettre en marché à une époque où les technologies changent, mais un portrait plus global se dessine.

« Le monde politique est dément, c'est comme si la nature était atteinte d'une maladie qui aurait surgi spontanément. Par le voyage et la musique, nous espérons pouvoir améliorer les relations entre les êtres humains. »







David Newland

David Newland ponders the contemporary worth and ritual of the campfire singalong.

In a recent article about the spiritual *Kumbayah* (Penguin Eggs, Autumn 2017), I explored that poignant song's virtual absence from folk stages. These days, I discovered, *Kumbayah* has been relegated to the campfire.

This left me pondering the relationship between folk songs and fires. Both have been challenged by modernity and industrialization. And yet both retain a power and a mystery that somehow seems ancestral.

Fire offers heat, light, security, companionship, and spiritual expression—and brings everyone into a circle. The campfire must have been the first venue for music. Later, as cultures adapted to unique circumstances, other sources of heat and flame have stood in—think of the woodstove at an East Coast kitchen party. Even the stereotypical barrel fire at a strike or protest isn't only for warmth. Around its symbolic central flame, songs (or chants) are still sung.

In the Arctic, where wood is scarce, the kulliq (traditional oil lamp) is often lit when Inuit gather—even in a local gymnasium. Throat singing and drum dancing, fiddle and accordion music follow the lighting of the flame.

I asked ShoShona Kish (of Juno award-win-

ning band Digging Roots) about the role of the campfire at First Nations powwows. She noted that the powwow is a post-colonial development, in which traditional and contemporary elements intermingle through the day in the formal setting. It's around campfires at night that stories are told, songs sung, and family traditions shared.

A fire represents continuity—but not without change. The campfires I remember from my childhood featured songs from the Anglo-Canadian oral tradition. But when I started to play campfires at tree planting camps in my early 20s, those songs wouldn't do anymore.

Our singalongs featured guitar-driven songs by Bob Dylan, Gordon Lightfoot, Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon, Johnny Cash, The Grateful Dead. John Denver's *Country Roads* is a perpetual favourite to this day. But the campfire also introduced me to Elizabeth Cotton, Woody Guthrie, Hank Williams, and Lead Belly, along with folk tunes from unnamed minstrels from around the world. They may have been learned from recordings, but they were kept alive by the campfire.

As for disco, punk, new wave, alternative, new country, hip-hop, dance, electronica, grunge, metal, and all the constantly emerging genres out there—we may not hear them much around the campfire at folk festivals. But neither should they be discouraged. We should ask ourselves, is it the high production values that prevent contemporary songs making that leap from the radio (or the Internet streaming service) to the fire? Or is it that the kids just can't get their songs in edgewise on the old boomer favourites?

ShoShona reminds me that at a block party in Toronto's Regent's Park, you can hear young hip-hoppers freestyling around a barrel fire, or rapping along to a Public Enemy classic.

Even within the folk context, campfire music can vary; it's not all about guitars. Wendell Ferguson's hilariously mean-spirited *Throw Another Fiddle on the Fire* lampoons what happens when players of tunes and players of songs can't share space. Sometimes Celtic or blues or bluegrass musicians need a fire of their own.

The uke craze brought new players to the fire, and they brought new repertoire with them, and a renewed enthusiasm for singing. I was at a campfire a few years ago where a guy showed up with an electronic keyboard. He wasn't very tasteful, and the flashing lights were distracting. Still, something drew him to the fire. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

After all, "folk", or folk-friendly, songs keep coming along that we want to hear sung. The '80s offered Springsteen's *I'm On Fire*, Bryan Adams's *Summer of '69*, or Cindi Lauper's *Time After Time*. There was a folk revival in the early '90s featuring the likes of Michelle Shocked (whose first album was literally recorded around a campfire), Suzanne Vega, Edie Brickell, Ferron, and the Indigo Girls, who delivered a campfire classic in *Closer To Fine*. There were songs from the Unplugged records, including Nirvana's cover of *In the Pines* and Clapton's *Heaven*. There was Neil Young's throwback, *Harvest Moon*.

Into the 2000s, songwriters Ben Harper, Jack Johnson, and David Gray made songs just right for campfires. Jason Mraz's *I'm Yours* is now ensconced. New songs hit the airwaves regularly that deserve to be brought to the fire. Beyoncé's country-inflected *Daddy Lessons* simply demands to be sung by a feisty chorus around the fire.

I'd be remiss not to mention Old Crow Medicine Show's reworking of a Dylan outtake, *Wagon Wheel*. This is one "new" song that has achieved immortality (or at least unavoidability) around the campfire, joining old chestnuts such as *Knockin' On Heaven's Door*, *Helpless*, and *The Weight* as 'closers'. *Wagon Wheel* has gained a bit of a reputation as a 'bro-down', often played by drunk guys with more enthusiasm than excellence. Still, a song that everyone can learn, and sing along to in an instant, is worth welcoming in.

Young people coming to festival fires may hear classic radio hits for the first time there, as the oral tradition reclaims its own. Importantly, they may also hear songs by their peers, or by songwriters whose work will never get to the radio. And they have the chance to offer their own music, purely because the spirit moves them.

Ian Tamblyn immortalized that urge in a lyric "*Got this out of tune old guitar, not tryin' to be no star / there's enough of them, on a northern night / all around the campfire light.*"

The campfire flickers on, and the folksong with it. Merely by forming the circle, and raising our voices together, we quietly posit a place apart from mass media, where the simple act of singing together is, in moments at least, an assertion of our common humanity.

I asked the young activist/artist Janice Jo Lee if the campfire still mattered to her, as a venue to play and sing songs. "Oh, yes indeed," she said. "That's story time. Around the fire, that's sacred story time."





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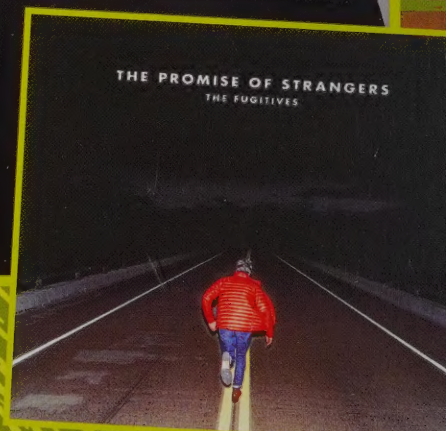


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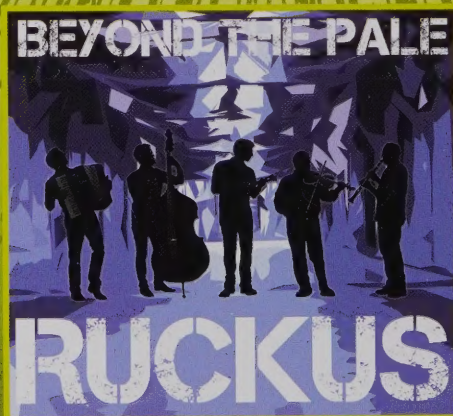
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